Theodore Plievier

# Stalingrad

## The mightiest, bloodiest battle of all time

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COMPUTRIZED

Hours under mortar fire . . . bodies without feeling, shrunken stomachs, empty bladders.
Then it suddenly stopped.
But that strange stillness was not the end, it was the climax of that whole gamut of horror.
There came a metallic droning, the rattle of chains, the rumbling of frozen earth, the smell of hot oil. Lumps of clay fell into the holes.
The tanks were rolling over the dugouts. One stopped, turned and ground dugout, snow and men beneath it.
Artillery, mortars, tanks—a whole machinery of hell developed by German technicians, which was now rolling over German soldiers as they crouched against the earth like petrified mummies.
And so an army hurtled to defeat amid the winter snows.

GOVT.
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Due 1851

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*Also by Theodor Plievier*
*in Panther Books*

Moscow

*Theodor Plievier*

# Stalingrad

1857

A Panther Book

Stalingrad

*A Panther Book*

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translated from the German
by H. Langmead Robinson

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1851

AND THERE WAS GNOTKE.

It was a grey November day and Gnotke had a spade in his hand. Eight metres long, two wide, and one and a half deep was the grave that Gnotke, Aslang, Hubbe, Dinger and Gimpf had just finished digging. Sergeant Gnotke, Sergeant-Major Aslang, Lance-Corporals Hubbe and Dinger and Private Gimpf differed in no respect from one another. They wore no shoulder-titles and no badges, and their hands and faces were as filthy as their uniforms.

The last spadeful had been dug. Hubbe and Dinger lifted a stretcher, Gnotke and Gimpf another. Having stuck their spades in the pile of earth and taken up the stretchers, they trotted off and vanished in the mist. It was in the region east of Kletskaya and in the loop of the Don between Kletskaya and Vertyatchi, in the area of the 376th Infantry Division. Two days' march eastwards lay the Volga and Stalingrad. This was the northern flank of the Division, along the Don bend. Before and behind, under the feet and in the air, was the front.

The Army Order for the Field Punishment Battalion ran: "Punishment, which will be carried out in the front lines, will consist of the most arduous and dangerous tasks, such as mine-clearing, burying the dead, the laying of wooden roadways through swamps, etc., under enemy interference, artillery fire, etc. . . .

"Conditions of punishment. Pay: Defaulters will receive a reduced rate of pay. Dress: To make desertion more difficult, uniform without badges. Regimental signs, collar badges, shoulder-titles will be removed. Accommodation: Will be worse than that of other troops. Mail: Will be the responsibliity of the officer in charge. Parcels will not be distributed but will be kept in safe custody by the unit delivering mail. Association with other troops or with civilians is forbidden. Lighting: will not be provided. Privileges: Will be granted in special cases at the discretion of the officer in charge."

For ten months Gnotke had been in the Field Punishment Battalion, of the origin and composition of which an

Army Order of the day stated : " It is known that war has a deleterious effect on soldiers and that the inevitable consequence of every period at the front is a slackening of discipline; and the longer the period and the harder the conditions the more noticeable this becomes." The last winter campaign and the march on Moscow had had " a deleterious effect " on Sergeant Gnotke, and " refusal, in the presence of the assembled troops, to obey an order " had brought him here. Private Matthias Gimpf was also an " inevitable consequence " of the last winter campaign. In a trench behind the frozen Shisdra—it had been on a day when trees cracked with cold and the wind drove fine powdery snow in the face—he had stood in torn boots and thin greatcoat, and like all the rest had kept his hands in his pockets when the regimental commander inspected the positions. On being spoken to about this by the commandant his answer had been an uncomprehending smile; he had not even taken his hands out of his pockets nor, as the adjutant had to point out, " clicked his heels." Thus he had furnished a perfect example of the " declining morale " of the troops, and as such he now had to serve. Sergeant-Major Aslang had not been long with the squad; the two lance-corporals had but recently been brought in by transport from Graudenz.

Gnotke and Gimpf had formerly been attached to the 4th Panzer Army and with this army had come over the Kursk steppe. While sappers cleared lanes through minefields this " chaff " of the previous winter campaign, sometimes augmented by villagers, women and adolescents, and evacuated Jews from Warsaw, Budapest and Hamburg, removed the mines. These squads remained right and left to clear minefields where the army had broken through; driven forward, blown up, ever reinforced with new " chaff," more villagers and more Jews, they were as much a part of the army and of the offensive pressing on eastwards as were the panzer units, front-line infantry and grenadier regiments.

As for Gnotke and Gimpf, more than once they had been thrown to the ground by blast, and suffered bruises and abrasions; they had even had to wipe from their faces pieces of flesh or intestines of the next man, sometimes of the next woman; but they themselves had not become casualties. With a lorry full of their kind, they had been attached to a regiment on the march. But in Valuiki they

had been debussed and allotted to a company of sappers, and now once more began their work on minefields and the shifting of barbed wire barricades amid bursting artillery shells, this time attached to the 6th Army on the Don steppe and deep into the Don bend.

In the northern loop of the Don bend they lay in dugouts and at night moved like ghosts in the river valley, fastening planks and sleepers together to make roads through the swamp. Again it was the exhausted and unnerved of the war, and the remains of shattered regiments, that were dying here—and not only from artillery fire but from fever and exhaustion too. For weeks it went on, and here between Kletskaya and Vertyatchi the German advance had come to a halt. By Kletskaya the Red Army had established a bridgehead and a jumping-off place for later operations. And while farther south by Kalatch and across the Don the 6th Army advanced across the Don-Volga steppe until it reached Stalingrad and came to a standstill in the maze of ruins, those here had been marking time on the spot, fighting on the spot, dying on the spot. A great mass of troops had been concentrated against this dangerous threat to the Stalingrad northern front: Kletskaya and the Russian bridgehead by Kletskaya. The 4th and 5th Rumanian Corps lay there; behind them the 48th German Panzer Corps, the 23rd and part of the 14th Panzer Divisions, and a Royal Rumanian Panzer Division made up of half German and half French constituents. This great concentration of massed troops was involved in heavy fighting, and suffered many casualties here and among the neighbouring German infantry divisions. Again and again the wooden roadways across the swamp and the pontoon bridges built by the engineers were smashed by Russian artillery, and for weeks the corpses of German soldiers floated downstream in the Don. There were many dead, too, on the steppe and in the hilly country east and north of Kletskaya; and Gnotke and Gimpf were put to burying the bodies.

Up to October, with the exception of the wounded taken to the rear through casualty clearing stations, they had buried almost the entire battalion to which they had been allotted, including the battalion commander and three company commanders. According to the burial officer's instructions, battalion commanders were to be provided with coffins made of planks, company commanders

wrapped in tent canvas, and other ranks in blankets. This may have been done at one time, but not now. Divisional chaplains held their funeral orations before medical and service corps men and drivers who happened to be passing and were stopped by the chaplains to form little congregations. This so'emn part of the burial went on without the assistance of Gnotke and Gimpf—only from the distance, when they looked up from digging grave after grave, did they witness it.

October had come and gone.

Now it was November.

Snow in the air; the ground frozen hard; snowdrifts, some covered with a thin layer of ice, filled cracks and holes, and from the low ground and the Don clouds of mist rose and covered the land. Now and then there was a flash like distant lightning in the upper layers of mist, followed by the roar of artillery, and somewhere in the mist a fountain of mud and snow and frozen earth. The troops crouched underground in their dugouts. Ammunition was brought up in the grey light of dawn, and not until the evening did the ration parties set off. Hardly a man stuck his head out during the day.

Only the burial squad went freely around.

That day they seemed more than usually like ghosts floating through the mist. One in front, one behind, distorted in the mist, they became one with the laden stretcher; and Hubbe and Dinger with their load between them, Gnotke and Gimpf with their load between them, resembled more than anything else slowly drifting barges.

The grave, dug by Russian women and aged men and widened by Asland, Hubbe, Dinger, Gnotke and Gimpf, was to have been a mass grave to hold the dead provisionally buried here and there and now being dug out again, as one of the monuments set up by Hitler on his way to the east. But, two days before, an attack by 28 tanks and an infantry battalion against the Russian positions, which the Russians had beaten off, had altered the dispositions of the burial officer; and now the grave, in addition to these weeks-old corpses, had to accommodate the dead of the tanks and of the infantry battalion. All the signs indicated that this would be a hasty burial, that here would be yet another of those "forgotten graves." The burial squad had already more than once been the

only chance witnesses to stand by the grave and hear the burial officer and the overworked divisional chaplain mumble inaudible words into the mist. As for shroud—in an army that already had the first period of sharp winter frost behind it, and had received winter clothing only in insufficient quantities—where should they find canvas and blankets for the dead? A mere covering was necessary—where pieces of stuff could be picked up--and then only for the short way to the grave. And the same bloodstained canvas had to serve again and again, and by night to be used to cover the damp ground where the burial men slept.

Hubbe and Dinger came back to the grave, set down the stretcher tipped it up, and the load fell down and bounced like a filled sack—it was one of the exhumed bodies mummified in blanket and frozen clay. Hubbe and Dinger lifted the stretcher again, without pausing, without looking up, and vanished in the mist. Gnotke and Gimpf arrived and did likewise. When it was one of the dead tank men or a panzer grenadier half the identity disc, the belt and leather straps, even the contents of pockets, were removed and put down in front of Sergeant-Major Aslang, who stood silently by the grave and at every appearance of Hubbe and Dinger or of Gnotke and Gimpf made a stroke on a piece of paper, and after every fourth stroke a cross-stroke. Even here in the mist, where the strict order scarcely applied, they did not speak—they had lost the habit of speech as they had lost the habit of warmth and light in the hole in the ground where they spent the nights.

Once, for several days, one of those " privileges at the discretion of the officer in charge " had fallen to Gnotke. As Aslang was to-day he had been excused the carrying of bodies and had stood from morning to evening at the graveside and seen it gradually fill up with muddy figures, the eyes glassy and staring in distorted faces, with torn-off legs, arms, halves of bodies, unrecognisable pieces of flesh.

" Darling Sepp . . .", " My poor dear Karl . . .", " My beloved boy . . .", " My dear son . . .", " My dear brother . . ."—so began the letters that he had collected, put with the other articles, listed and handed with the list of names to the burial officer in the evening. These were voices from a far-distant, sunken shore, and they could not reach Gnotke. He knew that those to whom they were addressed —in September, when the sun was shining and the earth

was dry—had lain on the steppe and been collected like dried wood. And he knew that with the passage of time they had lain there and become somewhat heavier; and that later (there had been days with the thermometer at 25, or even 30 degrees below zero) they had lain heavy and hard as stone on the stretcher, with limbs outstretched like a St. Andrew's cross, or in unnatural sitting positions that made them yet harder to transport and demanded much more space in the graves.

"My darling boy . . .", "Take care of yourself . . .", "Don't volunteer for anything, never push yourself forward . . ."—whatever was in these letters meant nothing, either to the dried corpses of the steppe, to the fresh autumn corpses, or to those gruesome frozen corpses; now they were but meaningless phrases, as Gnotke well knew. And whatever else the letters contained, of hopes, fears, speculations on the war—it all passed him by. He had reached a point at which there is no more hope.

". . . waiting anxiously for the end of it, and still more anxiously for your first letter after the battle, so that I shall know that you . . .", etc.

". . . There's still no end in sight to the fighting for Stalingrad. The capture of this town will put a certain term to this year's attacks."

". . . The struggle for Stalingrad is still going on. It was in the news-film to-day. I'm all keyed up. When will it fall? Perhaps to-morrow (Sunday) the news will come that it's completely in our hands!"

Again and again "Stalingrad." But his oft-repeated word meant nothing much to Gnotke. His past (he never thought of it) had been cut off ten months before and the present had no environment—not even a geographical environment.

Dampness, cold, sand, holes in the ground. On that November day it was dark soon after three o'clock in the afternoon, and the damp mist had already spread itself like a blanket over the system of bunkers and dugouts and trenches and barbed wire. The land was wrapped in darkness, and the deepest darkness was in that poorly protected trench where the outcasts of the field punishment squad lay on rotting reeds and muddy, bloodstained canvas, watched by sentries, and awaited the night.

In that eerie night Gnotke raised himself once again and

put his face close to that of Gimpf, with whom he had been together all this long, immeasurable time.

"Mathis . . ." he whispered.

Gimpf only looked at him with his bright glassy eyes and said nothing.

## AND THERE WAS VILSHOFEN.

But Vilshofen—that was something more than merely the face and the way of a man. It was the image of a world that was to arise anew out of blood and tears; it was the image of a society to arise from birth-pangs in a new form with changed national frontiers and changed conditions of government. But first it had been a thick cloud of dust rolling down from the Carpathians that in the course of a summer had spread across the Pruth, across the Dniester, the Bug and the Dnieper, and raged like a prairie fire over the Ukraine. In a second rush (and only in this second year had Vilshofen, till then on the Moscow front, taken over the panzer regiment) it had gone on across the Mius and across the Don, leaving burning villages and churned-up fields in its wake, to sweep over the Kalmuk steppe and penetrate the town boundaries of Stalingrad. It was a march of Might on caterpillar bands, and at the same time one of the hundred fists that were to batter and beat down the will and the independence of other nations. It had also been the problem of worn cylinders, of carburettors that should have been airtight but failed to keep out the fine dust of the steppes and thus caused engines to fail faster than spare parts arrived; it had been the problem of reinforcements both of machines and of men; it had been, too, some three thousand kilometres beyond the German frontier, an occasional giddiness at the thought of the broadening goals and the immeasurable war undertaking.

Vilshofen with his tanks had lain at the northern boundary of Stalingrad. They had been torn out of battles that on the hundredth day had been as far from a decision as on the first, and flung over the Gumrak-Rossoshka-Peskovatka road and across the Don as far as the front west of Kletskaya. Against army orders he had not made

the détour via Vertyatchi. His tanks, spitting smoke and mud, had driven through the idyllically situated Peskovatka, where the Corps staff and other staffs were quartered, and which was closed to troops; and he would have roared through Golubinskaya on the other side of the Don, the seat of the Army H.Q., if that had been the quickest way.

That evening Colonel Vilshofen, accompanied by his adjutant, stood at the roadside. His tanks were coming back—twenty-eight he had sent out, and nearly a score of them had passed. He awaited the rest.

The panzer grenadiers rolled by. The last transport lorry stopped.

"Hallo, Tomas!" called Vilshofen.

A man got out and approached through the mist. It was Company-Commander Captain Tomas. He confirmed only what the colonel had already learned from the men on the tanks. After an initial success the attack had collapsed in the fire of a neighbouring battery. Some 200 dead had been the sole result of the attack.

Four tanks had been left burning. Four others it had been possible to tow out, and these should be on the way. A tank came into view like a tug on a misty river, towing another, a damaged one. The second, third and fourth followed. The first was not very badly damaged: in Vilshofen's opinion it should be ready for action on the next day, or in two days. The second was a similar case; the third had merely lost one of its tracks. The fourth moved slowly, without caterpillar tracks, only on the rollers. A direct hit—the turret and sides showed gaping cracks. Why tow it away—it really wasn't time yet to collect salvage!

Vilshofen signalled it to stop, stepped up to the tank, switched on his flash-lamp, and looked through the hole into the interior. His face, shining in the white light, was that of a man approaching fifty, with a prominent nose and large clear eyes. What those eyes saw was the work of an exploding shell in the closed space of a tank's interior. The driver still sat in his place, but without a head. The flesh had been blasted off the chest and upper arms. He sat there, to the waist a skeleton through which lungs and heart were visible. The undamaged hands, still clutching the steering wheel, were like gauntlets drawn over the bare armbones. Of the other three men there was

nothing to be seen; what they had once been clung like a bloody froth to the walls of the tank.

The Colonel knew their names, knew too where they came from: "Bursted from Wuppertal, son of a tool-maker. Hoffmann and Rademacher, both from the same village on the Eder, and Sergeant Elmenreich from Schwerin," he said; and it was like an obituary.

Next day was the 19th of November.

It was the area by Kletskaya with the front to the north and west. In the west, that is, on the left flank, was the Russian bridgehead, and thence, stretching to the north and to the river, no-man's-land, low-lying ground covered with bushes, ponds and little lakes, with swamp and shifting sand. Along the front line and as far as the eastern part of the Don loop was a territory of hills and deep ravines that for weeks had been attacked by Russian artillery and infantry. Here and there the Russians had broken through with partial success, and these strips of territory had since been the daily target of the German Luftwaffe and the object of counter-attacks. On the night of the 19th of November a deathly silence came over this rumbling battleground.

There are sea-captains that suddenly awake from sleep: without having consulted the barometer, without the threatening sky or the leaden surface of the ocean before their eyes, they have sensed the approaching trough of low pressure, have breathed it in with the air. Here it was a colonel who raised himself in the middle of the night, sat on his bunk and listened intently. What could he hear? The breathing of his host, a flak-commander with whom he had found a billet. For the thick walls of the bunker shut out any sound from outside. Colonel Vilshofen stood up, strode through the ante-room. He mounted the steps and stood at the top. There was a heavy sky, snow and dampness in the air, the earth black beneath. But for a Verey light against the low sky far to the north there was nothing to indicate that here two armies were facing each other for life or death. A dark, sleeping land, nothing else —so it seemed. But Vilshofen was uneasy. He groped through the village of dugouts, found the hole he sought, switched on his flash-lamp and descended the mud steps.

A thick atmosphere of men huddled close together and the vapour of damp oily clothing rose to meet him. This was the quarters of his repair squad. He beckoned the

sentry, who showed him the bunk on which Private Wilsdruff lay.

"Hallo, Wilsdruff!" A broad-faced man with a moustache hanging over his mouth opened his eyes. "What's the condition of the two tanks, Wilsdruff?"— "Tanks. . . ." Then the soldier, fully awake now, recognised his regimental commander. "The tanks, Herr Oberst?"

"How long will the repairs take?"

"A couple of days maybe, Herr Oberst."

"Maybe. But how long will the job really take? I need them to-morrow!"

"Then we'll have to start at once!"

"Yes, start at once. It's urgent!"

Without waiting for the others to be awakened the colonel left. As he entered his own bunker again the flak-commander was also awake. He was sitting at the table, a sketch-plan by Vilshofen before him.

"It's going to start—before the 23rd," said Vilshofen. (A Russian attack was expected round about the 23rd of November.)

"It's never stopped here in the corner, Herr Oberst," answered the flak-major. "Anyhow, we're prepared for anything."

"We might be if we had enough heavy artillery here and at Hill 120. I fear the surprise will be not the attack itself but the extent of it."

"Might I ask a question, Herr Oberst?"

"Certainly, Buchner."

Flak-Commander Buchner looked at Vilshofen's sketch again. Vilshofen was known for his rough plans and sketch-maps made with a piece of charcoal, sometimes merely with a soot-blackened finger; what aroused real interest and argument were the marks he made by the pressure of his thumb to indicate weak points.

"This black patch here, at this point, I don't understand it. I think it's the point at which we're strongest."

"At which we ought to be strongest."

The 48th Panzer Corps lay there, the 23rd and the 14th Panzer Division and the Royal Rumanian 1st Panzer Division—considerable tank strength! But what did it really amount to? Vilshofen had had a look at it : a great part of the tanks were distributed in the width of the Don bend, some of them in repair workshops. Tanks, and men

too, had been worn out in the long summer advance and the ceaseless fighting for Stalingrad. These machines and men should not have been in the front line; they should have been in the rear for a thorough overhaul and weeks of rest, followed by training and large-scale exercises. That was true of the German divisions. As for the Rumanian panzer division, only one-half of whose armament was German, the other half consisting of French booty—it had not yet been in action and certainly needed large-scale exercises.

Vilshofen called his adjutant (he had noticed that he was up): "Latte—I've still got a stock of cigarettes: take a few packets to our repair squad and see how the work's progressing."

He turned again to Buchner: "Yes, as I was saying, if only there were enough heavy artillery on the flanking hills! But all I've seen there were a few flak and smoke-screen companies sent up at the last moment and some horse-drawn field guns,"

The door above opened and closed. A gust of snowy air blew downwards and again there was deathly silence.

"Twenty tanks," thought Vilshofen, "and those two will be ready—that makes twenty-two I can send in!"

The unusual stillness was felt, too, in the trench of the field punishment squad. Gnotke could have counted the drips that fell from the plank-roof. The sentry with steel helmet and fixed bayonet, blocking the entrance like a dark statue, probably did count them. Gnotke had long given up counting drips, but he sensed the silence as one suddenly misses the ticking of a clock in a room.

Gnotke lay awake till breakfast-time. Then there was a piece of bread and a pot of coffee-brew before setting out to work. It was still before daybreak. Aslang, Hubbe and Dinger looked around uneasily. To the north, where Russian batteries were usually active at this time, and in the rolling mist over the swampy ground in the direction of the Don, whence for weeks the rattle of machine-guns and the din of battle had been audible, there was now the same ominous silence.

They had taken up their stretchers and begun their usual trot. And yet everything was unusual. It was like a dream —it was in fact a real dream that came over Gnotke as he trudged with hanging arms into the mist. What was that?

Where did that come from? A hand, a woman's hand—a figure in repose, the limbs and face covered, the form only to be guessed at, like a soldier half buried in débris. But here the shroud was not earth and mud, it was a cloud of white sheets. And she was not alone; she lay with another. Only her hand was visible, and Gnotke knew that hand. Pauline!

On the morning of the 19th of November, Soviet troops broke through the German front north-west of Stalingrad. Gnotke was on the northern flank that leant against the Don bend; he stood precisely at the place of the northern break-through.

But what had happened before his eyes, what cries and vibrations had reached his eardrums, had long ceased to touch his consciousness. His inner self that was capable of feeling, desire, sympathy, love, fear, could hardly be touched now—over it lay earth, lay snow, lay many things. But he still had his clear eyes, and his ears were still sharp.

He saw and heard what at this hour was happening on the ground and in the air, heard the tumult around him. But for him, too, this hour was something totally unconnected with time. Where the stretcher had gone and what power had wrenched it from his hands he could not have said, nor how he had come to lie in a cleft, and how he had got back to the grave to find no grave there, but something else.

He lay in the cleft. On the left began the swamp and shifting sand that stretched to the Don, a territory now invisible in the thick mist billowing up like foam; but under the clouds of mist and foam there was a howling and whistling from a thousand open mouths. In front lay the German dugouts and battery positions; beyond them the Russian positions were discernible, but not for long. The Russian positions were wrapped in a seething smoke-cloud in which glowed rust-red patches. The red patches spread out, devoured the smoke, curtained the sky and made a steep cliff of red fire. The German batteries fought back; they fired out what they could. But it was like flinging glowing coals into a prairie fire and they did not fight for long.

Beyond the German lines was the cannon-fire, the exploding machinery that was flinging the metal over—shells in low, mortar bombs in steeper, trajectories—and the projectiles could be seen coming over and landing and

churning up the ground. It looked like a sea surface under rain with thick drops bouncing up. The moon-like landscape of craters crept nearer and encroached on ground where there was not only sand and clay, where lay dugouts and trenches and bunkers with built-in battery positions, and mortar and machine-gun nests; where lay ammunition stocks, command-posts with map-tables, stables and living and sleeping quarters embedded under thick layers of earth; where German crews stood and fought with eyes on direction-indicators, hands on firing-levers, or bringing up grenades and shells.

Death walked into the German positions along the whole front.

In the foreground and background smoke drifted to the sky. A heavy battery position was b'own into the air like a bursting triangle and the dark fragments were pieces of guns and metal and the bodies of the crew. Flashes. Balls of smoke in a swiftly-rising black cloud. Beams falling back to earth. Pieces of bunker roof. A horse falling from the sky, legs and hooves upwards. A barbed-wire barricade, with posts hanging to it, came down like a huge net. An infantry regiment with its divisional artillery was blown into the air, fell down, was again caught and mown down and pulverised.

And the figures that rose out of the crater, ran before the wind like dried leaves, fell over one another, lay down or dragged themselves farther, and again fell and again ran on—that was no longer a regiment, that was "chaff." A tall lieutenant who came out of the smoke staggering like a drunken man and suddenly bursting into loud laughter—that was no longer a company officer, it was a madman. A figure dragged itself over the snow like a worm, leaving a trail of blood behind it, and finally tumbled into a hollow : it was the officer of a company of panzer grenadiers, Captain Tomas of Vilshofen's tank regiment. The cloud of mud and snow moving down from Hill 127 towards the road was Major Buchner with a train of heavy flak guns. Their positions shot up, the flak company was in flight, having left behind the machine-flak, searchlight, sound-direction-finder and other apparatus. A man standing like a tall post at the exit of a dugout village stopped and collected round him anybody—sappers, infantrymen, tank men—that wandered leaderless in his direction and, making use of a defile leading to the rear,

marched them towards a ruined farm to which he had sent the remaining six of his twenty-two tanks. This was the tank commander Vilshofen.

The artillery attack reached a new phase.

Single mortar shells were still falling in front and churning up craters. But the massed fire had lifted. And something else was going on on the left flank under the spreading cover of mist. The Rumanians on the swampy ground had been routed. And now thousands of Russian soldiers, breast deep in the icy water, were unrolling kilometres of wooden roadway and laying it across river and swamp and shifting sand that would have swallowed man and beast.

That was the situation when Gnotke staggered up and made his way to the place where the grave had been dug and filled almost to the brim.

The grave was no longer there. Close by a crater had been torn, so big that there was room in it for a peasant hut, roof and all. The sixteen cubic metres of human flesh had been lifted into the air, to fall back and drape itself round the rim and inside the crater. And there (it was a well-known figure that drew him) Gnotke sat down. He could have lain at the bottom of the crater as did Gimpf, who was still with him; there was room enough there and he would have had some cover. But if Gnotke thought anything at all it could only have been that he did not want to be buried so deep, that he preferred to be nearer the sky. He sat down by the heap of corpses covered with clumps of earth, and next to him sat Sergeant-Major Aslang. Sergeant-Major Aslang's face was completely black and his teeth were bared as if he were laughing. Aslang's body soon gave no more warmth. Gnotke shifted a little and leaned against the warm carcase of a horse that had sunk down and died there. He remained thus without moving again. Smoke and mist drifted by and narrowed his field of vision. Daylight faded. The German front had been broken through, the front lines killed or scattered or mown down in flight or taken prisoner. An unstoppable stream of Russian infantry, tank and assault units were pouring through the breach.

What happened in Gnotke's line of vision, he saw; what went on to right or left, he did not see. Whatever happened, whether the caterpillar tracks of a tank passed close by, whether rifle shots cracked or sabre strokes cut

through the air amid wild shouts, he did not turn his head. He saw tanks moving over the landscape of craters, vanishing and reappearing in drifting smoke-clouds like boats on a choppy sea; he saw the flashes of their gun-barrels. He saw dark groups of men rising out of the swamp—those were the Rumanians running for their lives. Horses and riders hurled themselves at the fleeing men, horses wheeling on their hind legs while their riders hacked with sabres.

The piled corpses on the edge of the crater seemed to form the watershed on the torn front. Again and again approaching tanks changed direction there and turned south towards Kalatch. And the fleeing mobs from the Don scarcely got past this monument of death. Here and in a wide radius they were struck down with the sabre, and the Russian cavalry too turned south towards Kalatch. But none paid attention to this sickly-smelling mound encrusted with earth—tanks and Cossacks suddenly coming on it at once changed course and passed by.

Now it was evening. The east wind tore a gap in the ceiling of cloud and the moon shone through. A bleak light lay over the land. Gnotke's eye fell on a bush, some three feet high, of dried scrub. So that was still standing! Flat land, another clump of scrub, a wide flat surface, tracks in the snow under a dull moonlight, and a rustling emptiness.

Russian tank and cavalry forces had broken through the German front. From the region of Serafimovitch and Kletskaya the thrust continued in a south-easterly direction to Kalatch, there to join another wedge driven in south of Stalingrad, over the Volga, and to form with it a ring round the German divisions.

In the north three German divisions—the 376th, 44th and 384th Infantry Divisions—that had lain in the Don bend with the front to the Don, found themselves with their rear uncovered overnight. And while from the south the 47th German Army Corps, with the 62nd Infantry Division and the 28th Panzer Division and masses of troops thrown together, counter-attacked and in the battle in the Don bend were almost completely wiped out, the troops to the north were withdrawing to the south-east behind bolt positions that held sometimes for days, sometimes only for hours. The Golubaya Hills seemed to form the appropriate defence line; but with the Golubaya valley and the village

of Verchnaya Golubaya and the wooden bridges at Akimovski, Perepolni and Lutchenski they became the narrow pass through which the defeated troops with their artillery, supplies, staffs and rear services had to be filtered.

One of the first to see the Golubaya road and the village of Verchnaya Golubaya under normal conditions had been Colonel Vilshofen—the first time on his front towards Kletskaya, the second time when he came down again to get rations, ammunition, and petrol for the troops he had collected : that is, the first time a week, the second time a few minutes before the collapse.

He had breakfasted with the gentlemen of the staff in their undress uniform, later discussing with the Chief of Corps, a Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht, and a General Vennekohl, the disposal of the troops: and at this discussion had been astonished at the optimistic view of the situation given by these two gentlemen. That had been on the first occasion, when he had passed with his twenty-eight tanks (the others were in Stalingrad under repair). On the second occasion, when he had come down with only six tanks and some collected troops behind him to obtain rations, ammunition and petrol for them and while the bolt positions of the retreating infantry by Orexovski and Logovska were already breaking up, he had had to have Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht called out from his morning gymnastics. Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht had certainly been deeply impressed by the events related to him; but (and as Chief and General-Staff man he was probably right) he was not inclined to generalise over what Vilshofen had seen, nor to attach too great an importance to it. He was of the opinion that the Golubaya Hills would be held, and the 16th and 24th Panzer Divisions, already on the way, seemed to him more than sufficient to attain this object and to retrieve the situation. The artillery commander, General Vennekohl, had been of the same opinion and had said : " Man, what a smash-up there'll be for the Russians when the 16th and 24th P.D. crash into 'em! "

Vilshofen had expressed a different opinion, but the most serious thing for him was that he had obtained neither supplies nor petrol for his makeshift troops and had to come away empty-handed. And, in relation to the collapse in the Don bend, that was not at the eleventh

hour—it was at five minutes to twelve! Already on the way back he had had a picture of a Napoleonic retreat before his eyes. Rumanians, mounted and on foot, with and without weapons, German infantry, pioneers, engineers, the remains of ambulance companies, leaderless mobs, scattered and fleeing troops: all these were coming down from the Golubaya Hills into the valley, swarming over and through rear services on the march. And hours later there was a stream of horse-drawn peasant carts, armoured reconnaissance cars, artillery and infantry squeezing between the walls of the narrow valley. Vilshofen had had to leave his truck and cover the last few kilometres of the way on foot with his adjutant Latte.

Another in the swarm of humanity streaming through the Golubaya valley was the defaulter August Gnotke; and he had the defaulter Gimpf with him.

The day before, a hand had appeared to August Gnotke. The hand and the woman—of course that had been Pauline, and the white cloud was Pauline's bed. He knew it—and he knew the alcove in Klein-Stepenitz in which it stood. But what was she to him, for surely she had married the other fellow. But—a woman could appear to him as he groped through the mist, and that meant that there was still "something in him," there was still hope, and so he had made the first steps back into life.

He had fetched Gimpf out of the hole and set off with him. With Gimpf he had no luck, there was not a spark to be struck out of Gimpf. Now that they could speak to each other he had wanted Gimpf to say something; but Gimpf had only looked at him with his dead fish eyes and said nothing. So the two had wandered without a word over the moonlit field. Once they had to throw themselves down when a Cossack suddenly galloped by and vanished in the snow, and there they lay until they no longer heard the beating of hooves. Once, seeing a group of figures moving in the darkness and not knowing whether they were their own people or Russians, Gnotke had pulled Gimpf to the ground; and this had happened several times before they found a hole in the ground and crept into it. In this hole they fell into such a deep sleep that they did not notice how it gradually filled up with other scattered troops.

"The Russians are coming!" Only when this shout arose and men next to them sprang up and fled did they

wake up. By the glittering of spectacles drawing near to his face Gnotke perceived that there was another who had not run away.

"Our whole battalion's kaputt. You're from the 5th, aren't you?"

"No, we're from the field punishment squad."

"Oh, I see! Well, it's all the same. Doesn't matter."

The man in the spectacles was from Cologne. No longer a young soldier, he might have been as old as Gnotke He had a piece of bread and a portion of sausage in his pack and gave some to Gnotke and Gimpf. Of Russians there was no sign; not Russians but other fleeing troops came down into the hole after a while. When it was becoming grey outside Gnotke and Gimpf set out with these men, following the tracks left by others before them. From a slope they had a view down into the deep Golubaya valley with the masses of wagons, horses and men streaming through. They descended a gully and the man from Cologne met two men from his unit; they were his two friends from whom he had been separated in the night. One, named Schorsch, was also from Cologne; the other was Hans Kettler, from Krefeld. They addressed the man in spectacles as Tünnes.* These three, with Gnotke and Gimpf, kept together.

Now they were on the valley road to Verchnaya Golubaya. Traffic proceeded at a snail's pace; again and again wheels stopped and columns of soldiers were jammed together. Huts were burning on the hillside.

A detonation, a second, a third. Shouts of "Russian tanks!"

In the narrow space, with vehicles wheel to wheel and men crowded together, there was no room for any dispersal movement. Gnotke saw faces turn grey under their crust of grime. As always, Gimpf's watery blue eyes were staring at nothing. Tünnes said there couldn't possibly be all those tanks! Twice again they heard it, but there was no sign of tanks. Smoke rose ahead. When they reached the spot they saw that German tank soldiers, run out of petrol at the roadside, had blown up their tanks. The five smoking wrecks were the remains of a proud panzer regiment.

The column moved on. Daylight faded. Gnotke pulled Gimpf behind him, kept him with the crowd. This

* Local (Cologne) nickname, meaning "clown" or "joker."

expressionless face, that had appeared after mine explosions on the Kursk steppe, the Don steppe, the defeat by Kletskaya, that had come through smoke and slaughter with ever the same indifferent aspect, he did not want to lose. It was night when they reached Verchnaya Golubaya.

In the middle of the village square a large wood fire was burning, and Gnotke and Gimpf with the two from Cologne and the man from Krefeld stopped to warm themselves. An R.S.M. saw them, took them into a hut, pressed bread and a piece of sausage into the hands of each, and set them to clearing out some bunkers. They soon found out that this was the quarters of a corps staff. Tünnes and Schorsch and Hans and Gnotke and Gimpf carried out into the street whatever the R.S.M., a court-martial officer, a staff secretary and others handed to them. For Gnotke and Gimpf, who had come straight from the mass grave to this confusion of trunks and opened cases, startled staff clerks, shouting officials, white-faced officers, it was an uncanny business; and not only for them—there really was something uncanny going on. Since the previous May this apparatus of officers, of clerks with their retinue of servants and orderlies, in army cars and buses, followed by a caravan of lorries, had been moving from stage to stage and from village to village over seven hundred kilometres of conquered country. If for the troops it had been a march through blood and death, for the staff such things as corpses and sore feet and shirts stiff with sweat had been abstract conceptions; for its members the road to the Don had been a succession of triumphs. Here they had lain in huts and bunkers, and when weeks had gone by and the advance had come to a halt in the fighting in the streets of Stalingrad—then they had passed their off-duty hours in reading, playing cards, furnishing their bunkers, fetching up their horses while they impatiently awaited the new advance and the new marching order that should have been either "Right wheel, march—on to Baku and the Caspian Sea!" or "Left wheel, march—on to Saratov, Kasan, Moscow!" And even on the morning of this day they had not considered flight possible.

But to-night was uncanny!

Regiments were no longer regiments. Panzer regiments reported: Orders carried out; the last five tanks blown up.

Motorised artillery had to stay where it was—there was no more petrol. There was hardly enough petrol for the staff lorries on which the flight was to be carried out. But the alarm report: The Russians have broken through as far as Kalatsch!—meant, applied to their own situation, rapid retreat to behind the Don. Orders to blow up, and ammunition stocks going up in the air; blanched faces—a frenzy of destruction had gripped the members of the Staff. There stood Gnotke with arms outstretched while the secretary, a man of unhealthy complexion, loaded him with documents and ordered him to put them on the lorry that had driven up before the house. And there stood Gimpf with an R.S.M. loading him with brand-new boots, while Tünnes was loaded with pullovers, Schorsch with undergarments, Georg with uniforms, others with all sorts of things. Outside by the lorry a lieutenant turned them all away, telling them to throw documents, garments, uniforms, books on the fire. They obeyed and the flames leapt high into the air.

The secretary came out, looked round wild-eyed. "Herr Oberleutnant, the Front Service Regulations—I can't burn all that! Haven't you got room on the lorry?"—"What! Take your miserable regulations with me! Are you crazy, man? In this situation there *are* no regulations!"

Suddenly a lieutenant-colonel stood there, his ascetic features thinner than usual, hollow-cheeked. "What's going on here?"

"The Front Service Regulations, Herr Oberstleutnant!"

"Everything down from the lorry—throw the lot on the fire! Only food and ammunition to go on the lorries! It's a matter of life and death!"

The secretary withdrew and vanished inside the hut.

In front of the house the lieutenant had loaded his lorry with provisions and ammunition. The driver was helping him into his greatcoat when a sergeant, his face white as chalk, rushed up to him: "Herr Oberleutnant—in the office—he's lying there—mein Gott. . . ."—"What? Who? Pull yourself together, man!"—"In the office—the secretary—he's shot himself!"

. . . . . .

Three bridges led across the Don.

One, by Perepolni, lay under Russian artillery fire from the north; one, at Lutchenski, was menaced by Russian tanks and cavalry from the south; between them the bridge

at Akimovski was broken in the centre but had been made usable by means of pontoons across which thick planks had been laid. As the two men from Cologne, the one from Remscheid, and Gnotke and Gimpf arrived, the moon was still in the sky. They had seen the icy snow-covered river taking shape in the growing light of day, a frozen, bleak surface; the opposite bank was flat—swamp and shifting sand and a long view of open ground—and Vertyatchi, Peskovatka, Sokarevka, the villages on the other side, were open to any attack.

On both sides of the bridge the waiting grey mass of men, horses and gun-wagons were crammed together. Only at the bridge approaches was there any movement, and even here the narrow flowing column advanced only in jerks. The river was only sufficiently frozen to bear the weight of a child, or of a number of children. Lorries that had attempted to cross it had sunk through near the bank, and farther out men who had tried to walk across had broken through and vanished under the ice. Officers and field gendarmes—unwashed, unshaven, unbreakfasted —directed the traffic, shouted, gesticulated, now and then pressing themselves against the flood of men and horses to let through a motor-truck, an armoured car, sometimes even a motorbus containing a senior officer, groups of officers, the staffs of infantry and armoured divisions, officers and officials of supply depots, construction units and rear services.

There was one truck with a following of several heavy eight-tonners. In the truck sat a general, commander of an infantry division. With the main body of his unit he had come through Perekopka; some parts of the unit had been cut off and were wandering over the Golubaya road, others had got left behind The general's car rolled forward. In front was a crush of infantry and vehicles, behind was a crush of infantry and vehicles, to both sides a line of grey soldier faces. Some knew the general, had seen him at inspections, heard of him. Gnotke and Gimpf knew him as the supplier of many corpses.

And on pressed the stream of traffic.

Again the field gendarmes with their tin plates hung round their necks stepped forward; again it was a general and commander of an infantry division for whom they made way. The one who had passed in the truck was a medium-sized man with pale eyes and reddish hair. The

face peering out from the buttoned-up fur collar under the big cap-peak looked as if it had had several nights of orgies: the last nights east of Kletskaya—alarms, orders that failed to arrive, contradictory orders, reports of enemy tanks having broken through, abandoned supply depots, blown-up guns—had left their mark on it. The other, the one in the armoured car, short and stocky, had the brown, weatherbeaten face of a gnome. The one was known as a go-getter, not given to long consideration, a practical man and a realist. The other, posted from the War History Department of the War Office to the Army, was careful, weighed things up, a theorist and ideologist. The one, no scorner of the pleasures of the table, fond of women, a man who liked company, had managed to live his life even during the war; the other could do without company, and even during the campaign had continued his studies and literary work and written a number of essays on the Central European project, the problems and difficulties of the blitzkrieg, descriptions, perspectives, talks for periodicals and for the radio. While the one had saved a few thousand cigars from the defeat east of Kletskaya, the other had kept in his staff bunker and carried along with him a comprehensive manuscript entitled "On the Northern March-Route to the Caspian Sea" (the mooted southern route was the one via Cairo, the Suez Canal and Asia Minor). The one was Lieutenant-General Damme, the other Major-General Gönnern. When Lieutenant-General Damme's pale eyes regarded one of the figures on the way, he saw very precisely and noticed all details—the grey face, the filthy greatcoat, the badly-worn boots, the missing weapon or the missing blanket or mess-tin; he noticed on collars the badge of a heavy ack-ack unit and looked round for the ack-ack gun and saw none; he noticed the unit colours of artillerymen, motor-cycle riflemen, the badge of a wireless operator—but failed to discover the appropriate guns, motor-cycles and radio-truck. A colossal mess! was the conclusion he came to. When the other, Major-General Gönnern, let his eyes wander they scarcely fixed on details and hardly a single face impressed itself on him, nor any details of disorder in a uniform; but he saw a confusion of infantry, artillery, communication troops, saw horse pounds, bakery columns, butcher companies, workshop units. He heard ten thousand shuffling steps and heard the creaking and rolling

of the wheels of long lines of light and heavy vehicles; but it was not the loud rumbling of a marching army that he perceived. He saw more than two eyes could cover in one glance: the grey flood of men oozing through the Golubaya valley like a thick stream of lime, pouring down the road and inundating Perekopka, over the wooden bridge, licking out in broad tongues on the other side, and then pushing on farther to the east. And he saw the heavy sky above and already sensed the mass of snow that would descend on man and beast. This gigantic panorama he perceived; and as the wind sweeps over the sea so the manifold noises and audible and visible phenomena swept by—grinding of footsteps, trudging of battalions in the snow, shouts, curses, scraps of conversation, a message, the smoke of a field-kitchen, the smell of carbolic from ambulances, a horse expiring in its traces. It all came again, was a thousand times there, a monotony of mist and driving snow and the smell of blood and sweat and shouting and bent backs and lashing horsewhips and white sweat-rings on horses' legs and the endless band of weary soldier faces.

The two generals, one a few kilometres behind the other, were travelling the same road; they had the same picture before their eyes, but it was not the same thing that they perceived. Gönnern, sitting in the armoured car, drove down from the planks of the bridge on to the east bank. Around him was shouting and in front was shouting, and ahead a lorry swayed on the swampy ground; and the heavy lorry, the bent backs, the groaning bodies, the rag-wrapped hands—and bare hands too—on the wheels and sides of it, half-a-hundred prisoners-of-war who had to heave bogged lorries through stretches of swamp—that was one gesture of the total movement, a stroke on this giant panorama. Major-General Gönnern was not only commander of an infantry division, he was also an adviser and lecturer on the history of war. So he saw not only Russian backs bent to the ground, he saw Carthaginian, Macedonian, Ethiopian backs, and it seemed quite in order that the new Occidental empire's road to the Caspian Sea and on to Asia should be cemented with the bodies of conquered slaves. True, at this time and place the prisoners were not pushing *advancing* wagons through the swampy stretches. That was a distortion of the picture and a jarring false note—so Gönnern felt, but he did not

dwell on the thought. "Get ahead now!" he said to his driver.

Damme, too, had passed the bogged lorry and the Russian push-column; but no historical parallel occurred to him, nor had he thought about the old Roman Empire or of the new "Grossdeutschland" or even about a "grossdeutsche" road to the east. His eyes had rested on a pock-marked face with a pair of grey eyes, and he thought: "Getting on to thirty that fellow might be, probably loved a bit and fooled around and acted as if he owned the earth. And now—never another schnaps, never again a matka—a few more weeks, then he'll lie on his face and—finished! It's rough, of course, and no wonder such a chap has a look like ice."

General Gönnern saw the roads crammed with troops. He saw soldiers crowding round a field-kitchen, groups of stragglers that had lost their units, Rumanians with and without weapons, lorries loaded with wood blocking the road, a troop of women trudging through the snow. All these were manifestations of a collapsing order, and warning signs that haste was necessary. What Gönnern needed was a room and a table, and tables for his staff officers, and telephone apparatus and field gendarmes to seek and find men, and assembly points—there was not a minute to lose.

With Damme it was different. He took his time. Not the idealistic Gönnern but the go-getter Damme—the Damme who, when required, sent his men into battle without a qualm and open-handedly sacrificed them, and who on the Nyeshogol and east of Kletskaya had left wide fields of corpses behind him—it was he who in this beginning chaos showed human sympathy. Damme too saw the roads full of scattered troops, saw begging Rumanians, smoking field-kitchens, and the wedged lorries that had tried to get down to the Don and got stuck—"Where do you want to get to?" he had enquired of the drivers who with their loads of wood lay in the way like a barrier holding up the stream of retreating divisions. "To the Don, over to the other side and on to Bogutchar!" they had answered—"Are you crazy—across and on to Bogutchar! What do you want in Bogutchar?" The drivers spoke poor German. They were Italians; their unit was at Bogutchar, in the Voronesh sector of the front, and they had come to Stalingrad to fetch firewood.

They had dismantled a house and loaded beams and had failed to get through Kalatch on the way back, so they wanted to try here to the north. "About turn—back to Pitomnik, or Stalingrad if you like!" ordered Damme and waited till the drivers started moving off, this time in the opposite direction. Then he told his driver to follow on to the Divisional Staff in the village; he himself got out, left his car stuck fast in a crush of horses, wagons, men and sledges, and continued on foot. At a soldier he snarled: "What's your name, what's your unit? Can't you stiffen your bones a bit? Why don't you salute your superior officer?"

On the road he saw a captain limping along on a stick in front. "Hallo, Tomas? Where have you come from?" —"The same place as you, Herr General!"—"What's up with your leg?"—"The Russians hit it; it's not too bad; I'll have to have that taken out." Captain Tomas was not alone. A young lieutenant with with him, Vilshofen's adjutant. Tomas introduced him: "Lieutenant Latte."

"And where's Vilshofen?" asked the general.

"The Colonel is over there with the men."

Lieutenant Latte looked back to the Don and across it. "And I'm looking for Corps, I must find the commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht. Perhaps you can give me some indication, Herr General."

"In my opinion he'll be either here or in Peskovatka. What a bloody mess! What does Vilshofen think of it?"

"The Colonel considers we're going the wrong way, that on the contrary the Army should move westwards and try to regain contact with the German front as quickly as possible, even if it means giving up Stalingrad."

"Give up Stalingrad!" This exclamation came from Tomas.

"Yes, strong meat, but that's like Vilshofen; he always goes the whole hog."

"The Colonel considers there's hardly anything else to be done in this situation."

"Strong meat!" said General Damme again and took leave of the two. Soon afterwards he saw another familiar face before him, that of his divisional chaplain, whom he had sent ahead days before.

"Hallo, padre! What's the news and what are you doing here in all this mess?"

"I held a service here in Vertyatshi this morning, then

I went to Peskovatka Herr General. But there I saw as soon as I got out of the car that no service was possible in the confusion. The yard of the field-hospital was crammed with ambulances, a whole migration, they came from the south by Lutchenski. . . ."

"Peskovatka too, then?"

"Our lovely Peskovatka is unrecognisable. You knew Peskovatka as it was, didn't you?"

Did he not know it! And how he had liked it, how cosily they had installed themselves there! Peskovatka, with corps and divisional staffs, offices, inspections, field-hospital, rest homes, trees and bushes in the streets, had everything left untouched; no house or stable removed, even the trellis fences intact. It was deepest hinterland, and being closed to marching troops was in deepest peace.

"Really? Not recognisable?"

"Refugees everywhere, from yonder and from Kalatch too. Officers, mounted or in cars, Rumanians among them; you can hardly get through with a car."

"And what sort of gypsy camp is that?" The general pointed to a yard crammed with vehicles—horse-wagons, sledges, lorries. Even the yard entrance was choked with wagons and sledges full of soldiers with bandaged heads and wrapped stumps.

"That's the field-hospital, Herr General."

In passing Damme heard groaning from a wagon, and he heard words: ". . . Kletskaya . . . Perelasovski . . . three days nothing to eat . . . bread!"

Someone called: "Take him away, take him away, he's lying across my knees."

"Well, and where are we to put him?" Damme asked the man.

"But he's dead, has been for hours!"

Damme called to some so'diers standing near: "Here, lift this dead man out of here!"

"There's some more here!" came a voice from the rear of the wagon.

"Is there no doctor here?"

The chaplain came with a doctor.

"Doctor, the men have come from as far as Perelasovski, they've been on the road for days, say they've had nothing to eat!"

"This sudden deluge of wounded, Herr General! It's quite impossible to attend to them all here."

"But the men can't be left to die at the door of a field-hospital!"—"The house, the yard, the corridors are filled to the last inch."

"And what's going to be done?——"

"The order has been given to fit up some main dressing stations farther east. It is not yet decided whether most of the men are to be put on the march to Dmitrevka, to Novo-Alexeyevka or to other places, Herr General."

"You're from the Rhineland, aren't you?"

"Yes, from Aachen, Herr General."

"Been with the division here long?"

"No, I was in a rest camp. I've only just got here."

"But tell me: why aren't these men, the seriously wounded, flown out at once?"

"Army Order: only sitting wounded to be flown out."

"And the others?"

The doctor did not answer. He merely looked at the general; and the general understood and resolved to reach Divisional Staff more quickly and to ask no more questions about things that did not concern him, that were not in his province. Soon afterwards, finding a number of women before him, he stopped again. They were German women—like a flock of swallows in a snowstorm, he thought—quite young faces among them, all dishevelled, exhausted, looking as if they had been pulled out of the river. They wore the uniform of Red Cross Sisters.

"Is there anything I can do for you, ladies? Where do you want to go, where are you from?"

They were from Kalatch and were trying to get to Pitomnik airfield. They had fled from Kalatch when Russian tanks were already rumbling through the streets, and their lorry had run out of petrol on the way. There they were now, on foot, in blue-and-white striped uniforms, coatless, frozen and tired. Damme looked round inquiringly for the chaplain, but he had remained in front of the field-hospital; so Damme took the ladies with him to the staff of the infantry division.

The front of the division faced north-east; and, with the number of arriving and departing trucks and the invasion of strange officers of half-a-dozen beaten divisions coming over the bridges and flooding the land, the staff quarters bore more resemblance to a madhouse. At least the commandant and the officers of his staff said so. A number of commandants and senior officers from the other

side of the Don had spread themselves in the room of the divisional commander, General Geest. General Gönnern was there, and so were General Damme and the artillery commander, Vennekohl. All these gentlemen needed some help or other. They needed telephone connection with their corps (in most cases this could not be obtained, as the corps were also on the move), or liaison with the Army (this was impossible as the new position of Army H.Q. was not yet known). They needed supplies, accommodation, medical attention for their wounded, petrol for their vehicles: in short, they needed everything, and everything had to be refused them. The Division itself had only ten days' supplies in its stores, and stocks of petrol were still smaller. As to help for the wounded, the field-hospital and the main dressing-station were overcrowded to the yards. Quarters could be provided only in a few cases and only for staffs, and even for them there was very little room. General Vennekohl, with his staff, was accommodated on a pig-farm to the east of the town. For General Gönnern and staff two rooms of the staff of the p.o.w. camp and one of the guards' huts were vacated, and for the now quarterless guards some of the prisoners had to give up their bunkers. Even the sick-bunks of the camp had to be vacated.

Meanwhile General Geest and his staff were fully occupied with other matters. Their own position demanded the most strained attention. There were those retreating divisions; and behind them pressed the Russians. There were heavy attacks on their own sector and here and there a break-through. Sealing-up had to be done, and new measures were required hourly. A Russian tank attack had been beaten off the same day; but single tanks had broken through as far as the huts of Vertyatchi and into the streets. The west, yesterday deepest hinterland, had become the front overnight. Beyond the Don, by Perepolni, the retiring neighbour division was still holding a bolt position to the north; and by Lutchenski their own division was holding a bridgehead against enemy cavalry attacking from the south. Only so long as that bolt position and bridgehead held was the crossing of the Don still possible for the beaten troops.

Break-throughs to the north; in the west, battle with "turned front"; beyond the Don a construction unit and "collected troops" fighting against tanks and cavalry.

Still farther west, on the Golubaya Hills, combat groups like the one suddenly created by Colonel Vilshofen, who maintained that he could not disengage himself without pulling a whole dam-break after him, and whose adjutant was at that moment there to obtain petrol, ammunition, food and all possible help from the nearest division. Refugees from the south, who told wild stories of Russian tanks in the streets of Kalatch. Thus the situation presented itself to the Commandant.

A few yards farther along the captain of the staff company, Captain von Hollwitz, was sitting and thinking of the refugees' stories from Kalatch. "Contradictory orders, mein Gott, there's plenty of those here already! As for the civil population taking part in the fighting, with choppers, kitchen knives, boiling water--that sounds almost like Goebbels' propaganda. Still, one can expect anything! And it's a case for clearing out, anyway. Light luggage is advisable at such times!"

The commissariat officer stepped in. He was really in search of the supplies officer, but stopped for a moment to say: "The flour's done for, Herr Hauptmann. Sixty tons, think of it!"

Captain von Hollwitz thought of nothing and understood nothing. The commissariat officer realised that. He called Sergeant-Major Pöhls in. "Tell the Captain how it happened. You must know, Captain, that the flour was stored on the other side of the Don."

"I came along with a train of sledges and the store was burning. The flames were coming out through the roof. A lieutenant had given the order to set fire to it. I couldn't find out any more."

"See what's happening? Our lovely flour!" said the commissariat officer, and passed on.

Captain von Hollwitz was not alone for long. This time it was the Chaplain of the 376th, who had been staying for a few days as a guest of the Division. His entry interrupted the Captain in what seemed to be a very urgent occupation.

"What's the news, Herr von Hollwitz? Do we stay here or withdraw?" asked the Chaplain. Von Hollwitz shrugged. He did not wish to be held up from his occupation any longer; he was running his hands through papers, private letters, photos. The Chaplain noticed the open stove-door. He realised that von Hollwitz was looking

through and burning his private correspondence; he realised, too, that he was not wanted at the moment and that the other wished to get rid of him. But those hands nervously running through papers were an answer to the question about the situation at the front!

The Chaplain left.

He had made himself useful during his stay with the " strange " division. Now he needed from 1b the detailing of a fatigue party to dig mass graves, and from 4a the authority for an issue of bread for the wounded lying on the trucks in front of the field-hospital. In the corridor he met a corporal of the staff company whom he already knew by name and who was now runner to the troops thrown together on the other side of the Don.

" Well, Riess, what's it like over there now? " he asked

" We're being attacked by Cossacks. We need reinforcements, otherwise not too bad. But at the back of us, the next lot, it's a tank colonel's group, the devil's loose there," replied the corporal.

The Chaplain went in to the adjutant, a Major von Bauske; and here with Baron von Bauske was also the Divisional Commander, who, with Gönnern, Damme and Vennekohl, had fled the coming and going in his own room.

Baron von Bauske was speaking. Theme: Suicide in a hopeless situation. He told a story of his homeland, Rakwere, in Kurland, where in the year 1625 Germans besieged by Russians had blown themselves up with their wives and children; and he knew of other similar examples.

The telephone rang (it rang almost incessantly). A regiment from over the Don was seeking its commander; also the adjutant wanted to know where he and the troops were to find accommodation. " There isn't room for another man in Vertyatchi—not another man. I can't help it! " he answered and laid the receiver down. Continuing the interrupted conversation he said: " Yes, what can we do but——" when the phone rang again. This time it was the commandant of the p.o.w. camp. Bauske answered: " But listen, it's an order: the Russian bunkers to be vacated immediately . . . no, not in the stable, that's wanted too. . . . Well, what can I do? I can't help it. . . . Yes, as soon as it can be managed they'll be transported away."

Von Bauske turned to the others again. He looked at

his Commandant, General Geest. "Yes, what else can we do if the Russians shut us in here?"

Geest had no answer to that. Gönnern looked as if he were thinking hard. Damme regarded the ash on his smouldering cigar. Vennekohl thought of his wife and little eight-year-old daughter, whose photos he carried in his breast-pocket, and said: "Blow yourself up with wife and child, that's a delightful idea, I must say!"

Said Bauske, with the air of an expert: "In a fight between Slavs and Germans the losing side always kill themselves!"

"Well, what's your opinion?" Vennekohl turned to the Chaplain.

The Chaplain had a number of arguments against suicide which he brought forward. They merely drew an indulgent smile from Bauske, and not only from Bauske. Yet the gentlemen were glad when the conversation was interrupted. The First General Staff Officer entered with reports from the front. Geest, after reading them, said: "Frightfully difficult, but we're holding. As for the situation over there, there's no telling what's going to happen. If Vilshofen wasn't standing on the Golubaya our bridgehead would be untenable!"

The Ia had something else, a radio message from Army Headquarters. Geest read it and passed it on in silence. The message made them forget for a while the mounting danger on the other bank. Vennekohl, too, read it, then polished his monocle, fixed it in his eye and looked in turn at Gönnern, Damme, the Ia, Bauske and the Chaplain.

"Gönnern, you know history. Are there any actual examples of it?"

"Yes, Valdai and Cholm."

"The Valdai Hills and the Cholm area last winter, h'm, things weren't going so well there either. But I mean earlier, in the history of war?"

"No, no examples. Except in a few cases of fortress warfare."

"I think it's always been a matter of principle to fight your way out when you're surrounded."

"Get out of the trap, nothing else to do, obviously," said Damme, forgetting that an hour ago on hearing these tactics recommended by Vilshofen he had called it "strong meat."

"Come in, Unschlicht!" called Geest to Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht, Chief of Corps Staff from the other side of the Don, who had opened the door and was about to withdraw with an apology. "We've got to 'hedgehog.' What do you say to that, Unschlicht?"

Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht was a man who carefully weighed his words. He replied: "I am aware that the Commander-in-Chief has considered the difficulties that must arise in establishing a hedgehog position. In his view the difficulties are, first, that on the proposed new west and south fronts there are no prepared defence positions whatever and, secondly, the impossibility of supplying such a large army by air. The commanding generals agreed to this judgment of the position, and a corresponding report has been radioed to the Führer."

"Here's the answer," said General Geest and handed over the message in which were drawn up the new defence lines to be taken up on the basis of the hedgehog order

"There must have been serious grounds for issuing this order," said Unschlicht after reading it.

"Well, those up top must have had something in mind."

"Quite likely the relieving army's already on the march," said Gönnern.

While this conversation was going on a truck drove into the yard and Colonel Vilshofen sprang out. In less than a minute he stood before the assembled company in the adjutant's room.

"Gentlemen, the 384th can hold no longer The Perepolni bridgehead's been blown up. What's needed is this: collect any troops here in the town—anything that can move—and get them across immediately. I beg your pardon, Herr General!" He introduced himself to Geest. "Vilshofen."

"As for my group" (this was a report to Unschlicht, the Corps Commander to whom he had been allotted), "we've retreated via Orexevski, Osinski and Verchnaya Golubaya as far as the dairy farm and now stand with another line, a very thin line of troops, between Lutchenski and Perepolni. I urgently need ammunition."

Unschlicht looked at Vennekohl. As the latter said nothing he replied: "We've blown up, by order, all the stocks of ammunition that could not be carried away."

"Blown it up—but, gentlemen!" Vilshofen regarded the faces more closely. Had they altogether lost their heads?

he wondered. And what sort of talk was that that he'd interrupted? What was the meaning of "hedgehog"?

"Gentlemen, as I entered I heard the word 'hedgehog' —what is that? Is it some undertaking considered and planned in advance and prepared for by accumulations of ammunition, petrol, supplies, special siege weapons, et cetera, et cetera? No, it obviously isn't, and nothing of the kind was planned. On the contrary, such a possibility has never even been considered. Our stocks are extraordinarily low, and of the little we have part has been left behind in retreat and part too hurriedly blown up Gentlemen, where is that to lead to? Hedgehog—that means (let's call a spade a spade) we're surrounded. That's a state of affairs forced on us, and we must get out of it as quickly as possible!"

"Read this first!" Geest handed Vilshofen the radio message from Army Headquarters.

"What does it say?"

"It says the Führer has ordered the hedgehogging."

"Yes, and here I've got the parallel order—the only one, by the way, that I've received from my immediate superiors—and it says the troops are to be put on half-rations from to-day. So that's how hedgehogging begins, is it?"

"Yes, that's how it begins. It can turn into a hell of a mess!"

"Well, anyhow, I'm going back. And I must have 3.7 anti-tank, 5cm. hand-grenades, and machine-gun ammunition; and that troops must be thrown together here immediately I've already told you!"

General Geest did more. He had an alarm company made up of the staff company, supply services, and scattered troops that had been picked up, and had them taken over to the other side by the Staff Captain, von Hollwitz, in support. Night was already falling as Geest returned to the adjutant's room to take leave of Gönnern and Damme.

Vennekohl and Unschlicht set out for the eastern boundary of the village. Gönnern and Damme were going the same way and shared the same car.

There were mist and soft snow in the air. The streets were still crowded with soldiers. The two generals drove to the north of the village and along the road by the river.

Orchards bounded the road to the right. The white-sprayed trunks of apple-trees flitted by like ghosts. To the left the swamp stretched to the river and to the Perepolni bridge.

Movement ahead—clattering of plates, mess-tins, knives and spoons, spades, marching troops. It was the alarm company led by Captain von Hollwitz, on the way to Perepolni bridge. In the ranks of this company were also the soldiers picked up by an arrest-party: the peasant from the heath by Celle, the one from Ostermiething, the lad from the Ottakring, the bookkeeper from Durlach, the schoolmaster from Zwischenahn, the storekeeper from Leipzig, the two metal-workers from Cologne, Schorsch and Tünnes, the knife-grinder Ketteler from Remscheid, Sergeant Gnotke, Private Gimpf.

Gönnern and Damme drove past, leaving the marching column behind like smoke.

Two kilometres farther on stood sentries at a long barbed-wired fence. Behind the fence, some standing, some lying in groups, were the Russian prisoners who had just been deprived of the bunkers they had dug for themselves in the ground.

The car drove a little farther. As it halted at the command barrack and Gönnern and Damme got out and glanced at the bleak surroundings, a detonation boomed from the Don, a hit by Russian artillery firing at intervals at the Perepolni bridge.

" Well, anyway, we shan't stay here long! " said Damme.

Senior Medical Officer Viktor Huth had been in a rest-home beyond the Don. Quartered far from the rumbling of the front in a lonely farmyard of the Golubaya valley, he had been looking at the autumn sky, seen the winter draw on, and thought about the war and of his own entry into it. Of course, it could not go on like this indefinitely —yesterday over the Nyeshogol, to-day over the Don, to-morrow over the Volga, then over the Ural River, and one day perhaps over the Amu-Darya and the Indus. And he with his medical company always trotting in the rear, handing the men purgatives or remedies for diarrhœa as the case might require, giving them nitigal for scabies and cuprex for crabs, injecting them against smallpox, dysentery, typhus, paratyphus, sewing them up and making them fit for service again, preparing them for

transport to the rear, or leaving them to his colleague the chaplain to "prepare" in his own way. And from stage to stage, always a few kilometres farther east, starting a new cemetery and finally looking back on the record of the growing number of his forest, steppe and desert cemeteries —no, that could not go on for ever. Some time there must come a break! But the dam-burst, the catastrophe that sooner or later must come—Senior M.O. Huth had not expected it from behind, he had expected it from the front. He had never imagined that it could come from the rear, from the west, and the flood carry him farther to the east! In the rest-home he had suddenly received the order to march out and report to the Divisional M.O. at the field-hospital at Vertyatchi. No transport had been put at his disposal, neither had he been able to get a lift on one of the lorries on the Golubaya road. Leaving his personal luggage behind, he had gone on his way, and his had been one of the faces in the swarm of humanity streaming over the Don bridge.

In the Vertyatchi field-hospital he had spent only one day and one night. On the very next day he had been posted to a medical company and to a Staff-M.O., Baumler. Both had been put on the march to a motor and tractor station south of Vertyatchi, to set up a main dressing-station there. On reaching the courtyard they had found crowds of wounded. Like those at the Vertyatchi hospital these wounded were still lying on their transport and there was no possibility of unloading them. The house, and the tractor sheds, too, were occupied and crowded out with troops. It was evening when another order arrived: to set up the main dressing-station farther back, east of Dmitrevka, at a little place called Otorvanovka, lying outside the village.

The way led down into the Peskovatka ravine and to the road from Peskovatka. When they had left the ravine behind them and reached the road they were no longer alone; they were but a little group in a stream of infantry, ambulances, ammunition wagons, luggage transports, staff cars, clothing and ration lorries, that were evacuating Peskovatka and Vertyatchi, or were on the road from farther away, from the Don area. Over the marching column and the towering lorry loads hung a low grey sky from which damp snow was falling on man and beast and machine.

Huth and Bäumler marched side by side. Both had sleepless nights behind them, and their conversation—concerning where they came from, getting to know each other—soon ceased. Bäumler was twenty-nine years old, Huth thirty. Bäumler had attended the military medical academy and adopted an army doctor's career from the first. Huth—from the little he had heard it seemed a strange career to Bäumler—had not been an army doctor until the war.

Bäumler was thinking of the establishment of the main dressing-station, of the limited inventory of appliances rescued from over the Don, the small quantity of medical supplies, the short staff (the medical company had counted six doctors, one dispenser, one quartermaster, altogether 165 men) that would have to suffice now. Well, they would have to manage somehow! Bäumler looked round for his colleague Huth. Huth had lagged behind, leaving the train of Russian carts to pass him. Bäumler noticed with displeasure that he had climbed on to one of the sledges behind, which, owing to the bad going over very thin snow, carried the lightest load. Now Bäumler did not think of his "colleague" Huth, but of the Huth who was under his orders. "Of course he's tired—who isn't? But that's pretty slack; he ought to be ordered off the sledge!" But Staff-M.O. Bäumler did not do so; he trudged on angrily in the snow and mud.

Huth was not thinking of the work before him. He sat there dozing. When he looked up he saw now a heavily laden lorry, now the legs and mud-splashed figures of marching soldiers, and once a herd of cows that belonged to a corps staff. Strange ways he was going, and the war looked different from what he had imagined up to a few days ago—so his thoughts ran as he rode along inhaling the damp cold air. Strange ways! What did that General say yesterday—or was it the day before? "The men can't be left to . . . why aren't they . . .?" Of course they couldn't. And yet they were! If a man lay there with a stomach wound that needed an operation lasting an hour and a half—a handful of gauze on the wound, the patient laid aside and the case finished, for ever finished. One couldn't do that—and yet one did. One couldn't keep twenty or thirty waiting an hour and a half, some of them in just as bad a condition as the one with the stomach wound. One did what one could and tried to carry on.

"Strange ways—and here am I on the road from Peskovatka to Dmitrevka or Otorvanovka. And Lucia—strange ways she's going in Berlin! So she's in the N.S. Frauenschaft now. And Africa belongs geographically and climatically to Europe, she writes. And there are other 'factors' in her letters—key position, our unique Führer, every man a fortress and so on. All that's wanted now is: The Jew is responsible! But no, she can't say that, not with a Jewish father. Good job for her she's illegitimate and there's nothing in her papers about her origin. And she writes about the tobacco shortage, the German soya bean, buying 'under the counter,' the high price of poultry, the thriving black market, the brave home warriors. Yes, those were the days, when I lived there among her plywood furniture and we used to play dominoes to decide who should get up first and go down and get the breakfast. Those were the days! If Hitler hadn't come along and thrown the Jews out of the lecture-rooms and clinics and made it practically impossible—because doctors were urgently needed—to fail in the examinations, and provided the remittances from home had continued to arrive, it might have gone on for ever."

Medical student Viktor Huth had been interested not only in medicine but in many other things too. Not merely in literature, painting, music, sport and politics, but equally and personally in writers, painters, musicians, sportsmen and politicians—and he had sought them out in café, studio, atelier or wherever he could find them. Among politicians he had been as interested in those of the left as in those of the right, or in the Nazis: had tried to grasp the basis of their thought and their relationship to the whole. No wonder then that people living, acting, suffering, those caught up in affairs and intrigues, took up more of his time than the study of a suicide's corpse in the anatomy class, and that the terms were all too short even to make a proper start on all these subjects. Well, Hitler had come, and Huth, mainly on the strength of his knowledge of boxing and gymnastics, had passed in medicine. Then he had done a year in the Army and afterwards—greatly to the relief of his family—gone through the clinical term. He had not dropped Lucia but—contrary to the views, expectations and intentions of his family—continued to live with her. For a time he had been an assistant doctor in a big Berlin hospital. Then came the

war. And now—snow, a Russian sledge, before it a slow horse with a shaggy coat, and he sitting on the sledge, bound for Otorvanovka.

On one side five wooden houses, on the other three clay huts: such was Otorvanovka, where the main dressing-station was to be.

Fit up a main dressing-station, said the order.

The wounded from Verhyatchi, Peskovatka, from the front now being built up on the Don, were to be accommodated and attended to here. For the present, however, there was no time for "fitting up," for work had to be begun at once on the crowd of men already there. Hundreds had been attracted by the rumour that a dressing-station was to be established here. They had arrived in ambulances, lorries, carts, sledges, and on foot; and the huts were crowded to the last inch.

Scarcely had the lorry with the electrical apparatus been unloaded and the lighting installed in one of the rooms (which first had to be cleared of wounded); scarcely had the big operation lamp—that is, two lamps over two tables—been fixed in position, when Staff-M.O. Bäumler and Senior M.O. Huth were already leaning over the first of the long line of wounded men and unwrapping their filthy, bloodstained bandages. The work began. The man in the rubber apron with a surgical saw in his hand was no longer the M.O. of a Bavarian garrison who went ski-ing on off-duty days in winter, tanned himself in summer with swimming and sailing and spent the evenings playing cards in his favourite cafe; and the other was no longer the bohemian who played dominoes with a Lucia and chess in the café, and divided his free evenings between political meetings, musical and sporting entertainments, discussions on Chinese poetry, psycho-analysis, architecture, or the new Aryan art. The two men in rolled-up shirtsleeves and rubber aprons were not physicians and surgeons in the ordinary meaning of the word; they were heavy workers with knife and saw, tying up arteries, sawing bones. Their assistants loosened bandages, applied clean ones, anæsthetised patients, sterilised instruments, held an arm, a leg, in the required position while the doctors sawed and cut. Bäumler's assistant was trained to every move of his operating surgeon and obeyed the slightest sign. Huth's, working with him for the first time, had not yet acquired the same instant reaction to the surgeon's needs. Suffocating

air and the smell of wounds. Sterilisation apparatus and swinging lamps overhead radiating heat. No window must be opened. Perspiration pouring down from surgeons and assistants. No end to the procession of torn bodies. One carried off, another laid on the table. Blood running over the planks.

No looking up. Morning came and Bäumler stood in a pool of blood and Huth stood in a pool of blood. An orderly came with cups of black coffee. Bäumler grabbed one, drank without sitting down. Huth did the same—he closed his eyes for a moment, then again bent over a torn human limb. A thigh wound: a shell-splinter to be removed with the knife. Tetanus injection. Bandage. The next: shot through the buttocks. The man lay with his face on the ether pillow, tunic drawn up over his head, trousers down, feet in heavy, mud-crusted boots. The rag bandages were cut off, the edges of the wound cleaned, a draining-tube inserted. The next: shot through the belly. Hopeless. A piece of bandage on the wound, and laid aside. Next!

And there were sick men: "What's the trouble?"—"Headache!" "Stomach-ache!" "Swollen feet!" "Swollen joints!" "Stitch in the side!" And there were some complaining: "Pains everywhere, from head to foot, inside and out!"—"What's your unit?"—"So and so!"—"Well, go back to your unit." There were walking wounded, sitting wounded, and seriously wounded. There were sick men and there were malingerers. Two doctors and thirty medical-corps men viewed the men, "sorted them out." In the evening it had been a few hundred, in the morning it was still a few hundred. From Vertyatchi, from Peskovatka, loaded ambulances arrived.

Next . . . next. . . .

"Sir, there's no more room!"—"Send them away. Those that can walk must walk, those that can't will have to get lifts on lorries! Next!"

Ambulances from Peskovatka loaded with wounded, ammunition lorries from the front loaded with wounded. No more room in the huts. The drivers laid the wounded in front of the house and drove off. In the rooms the sitting wounded, and also those that could not sit, crouched against the walls. Hopeless cases lay on the floor, on wooden planks, on the trampled clay in the clay huts.

Four hundred and over the sergeant-major counted.

By the operating house a horse was slaughtered for the field kitchen; behind the house a trench was dug for the dead, another trench for the blood, pieces of flesh and pus that was carried out in pails.

Next. . . .

The soldier showed his swollen, purple-coloured feet. Frost-bite, first degree—"Frost-bite ointment, fit for duty!" The soldier received from an orderly a brown ointment and a bandage, not too thick to go inside his boots, and was passed on to a sergeant-major who was collecting others fit for duty. Some, who had taken a peep into the huts and had no desire to stay, reported of their own accord A sergeant was put in charge of them and off they went, not in marching order, out into the night, direction Peskovatka, direction the Front.

Next. . . .

Clay and blood-smeared lobes of flesh, crusted wounds, open wounds. Fresh blood flowing under the scalpel. Doors shut, windows shut. Stench from a hundred festering wounds. An atmosphere of decomposition as from a tropical swamp. The thermometer showed 38° C., and outside was again ice-cold night. Black coffee. Pervitin. Carry on! Examine, prepare! From Vertyatchi an ambulance—wounds from shrapnel and bomb-splinters. Tanks, and bombers over Vertyatchi, over Peskovatka—the front coming over the Don, coming nearer!

Bäumler's assistant collapsed. Perspiration was streaming down the bare arms and blood-splashed torso of Bäumler. "Take a rest, Bäumler—for goodness' sake lie down! I can carry on for a bit!"

Bäumler took off his apron, hung it on the nail and went into the adioining room. Huth carried on, with tweezers, with scalpel, with scissors, with saw. He extracted bullets, picked splinters out of mangled flesh, evened up the edges of wounds, sawed off legs, sawed off arms. That night he made up for all the worry that a father, a sister, relations, had ever suffered on his account, and put to shame all that had ever been said about the "eternally studying" assistant doctor who was always occupied with anything but medical questions. That night he qualified. With hands that had once dreamed the artist's dream of creating the living, the beautiful, the perfect; with these nervous yet sure hands, that might have been those of a master surgeon, he worked against the stream of torn and bleeding bodies arriving on

wheels, on sledges, on foot. He worked until his colleague Bäumler woke from a death-like sleep, came into the room, took his apron off the nail, and relieved him.

Forty-two hours had gone by since the first wounded man had been laid on the table.

The front shifted farther to the east.

Since the 19th of November the divisions beyond the Don, taking General Geest in Vertyatchi as marker or pivot, had carried out something like a gigantic "About-turn! On the left, form squad! Across the Don! Direction east!" When the Russians from the south, from Kalatch, pressed on over the Don with tank and cavalry units; and Vertyatchi, Peskovatka and Sokarevka, the villages on the left bank of the Don, had to be given up, a wing movement of nearly 90 degrees had been carried out. The 384th Infantry Division, decimated in earlier battles and finally routed at the Perepolni bridgehead, had had to be taken out and split up. The 76th, the 44th, the badly mauled 376th, and in the south the 3rd (motorised) Infantry Division, took up new positions west of the Rossoshka valley and down to Kalatch on the Kalatch-Marinovka railway line. General Geest's division had made the shortest pivoting movement, and the troops on nis right flank had only had to cover a few kilometres. The soldiers left their well-made dugouts to find holes in the ground big enough for two or three men, which General Geest had had dug in great haste by Russian prisoners. The men of the other divisions did not even find as much as that; they found themselves on the open field, and their most important weapon was not the gun but the spade. It was flat country, and the only features of the landscape were occasional slopes, the gullies leading to the Rossoshka Hills, the ravines in the south sloping down to the Karpovka stream, and channels worn by the spring thraws. There was snow, and the temperature sank from twenty to twenty-five and twenty-eight degrees below zero Centigrade. That was the line west of the Rossoshka valley designated by Army H.Q. and Führer's Headquarters as "to be held in all circumstances and at whatever cost." The steppe settlements, Bolshaya Rossoshka, Baburkin, Novo Alex-eyevka and Karpovka were now the quarters of the staffs. West of these lay Dmitrevka and the four wooden huts and three clay huts that comprised Otorvanovka.

Snow, frost, a waist-high hole with a tarpaulin over it.

Such were the positions; and those who had brought dugout stoves had no firewood for them. In one of the holes crouched Sergeant Gnotke, Private Gimpf and the lad from Ottakring. A few yards away in another hole lay Tünnes from Cologne. He was a motor mechanic, and his real name was Ewald Stüwe. His companions were Georg Ketteler, knife-grinder from Remscheid, and a supplies sergeant, Erich Urbas, who had also been picked up at Vertyatchi. In the next hole lay a peasant lad from Sudetenland, a soldier from Billerbeck in Westphalia, a farmer from Hohengüstrow in Mecklenburg; and others lay in other holes. The company in position here was the alarm company of Captain von Hollwitz, half the men coming from the staff company, the other half consisting of stragglers picked up at Vertyatchi—men from Westphalia, South Germans, Sudeten Germans, gunners whose guns, tank-soldiers whose tanks had been abandoned in the retreat. Their one dream was of a dugout, a real dugout with a stove, such as those not on sentry-duty were building behind the snow holes; and their one hope was General Hooth coming from the south, so it was said, with a panzer army to break the ring round them.

There was little said about this. Snow and cold kept mouths closed. As for Gimpf, there was something more that kept his mouth closed. What was it?—Gnotke wondered as he dug his spade into the ground and lifted out the frozen clay to deepen the hole. Of Gimpf he knew little, but at least something. Gimpf was a farmer's son from Alten-Affeln, in Sauerland. Because as second son he was not eligible, under the new real estate succession law, to inherit the farm, his father had sent him to the High School in the neighbouring town of Hagen. In the war Gimpf had been posted as a lance-corporal to an officers' training course at Munich. There he had got mixed up with a soldier's wife and still more with her husband, who claimed to have found a blanket and a tent canvas of Gimpf's in his flat and denounced him for theft of military property and, on top of that, for misconduct. Gimpf had been sent to the front and in the winter campaign had run into trouble again in the Shisdra region. But that was only half the story, and the unimportant half, for even before Shisdra he had been near Vyazma or in Vyazma and something had happened there. What that had been Gnotke did not know. And he could not get it out of

Gimpf. Gimpf was silent on the subject; he seemed to be altogether dumb, and only uttered short cries forced out by cold or hunger or by his physical condition.

"What was her name, the one in Munich?" Gnotke tried to pump him again. Gimpf only looked at him out of his blue, absent eyes, and bent over his work again.

"Liese, wasn't it?"

"Yes, Liese."

"And when her husband suddenly came home on leave——"

"Yes, he came."

"He had a look at the pictures of you and her, the photos hanging on the wall?"

"He did."

"And demanded money of you? He was a proper——"

"Yes, and I gave him my watch too."

"You did? And he gave you away after that!"

"He did."

"And you were sent to the front and your career ruined?"

"Yes, ruined."

"And then you were in Vyasma. . . ."

That was the point at which Gimpf became silent. He no longer gave even monosyllabic answers, and Gnotke could get no further with him.

Gnotke talked of his own affairs. "There was a girl in our village, she was called Pauline, she lived next door. . . ." Yes, Pauline—she was sure to have married his former S.A. comrade, Sergeant-Major Riederheim, the man who had got him into the punishment squad. It was a long and tangled story and Gimpf was not interested; he was not even listening, and Gnotke broke off again.

Neither did Hooth and the approaching panzer army interest Gimpf. That the lad from the Ottakring had to slip his trousers down every few minutes and squat over his spade and that there was blood on the spadeful of clay he flung out into the snow was no concern of his; nor that the Remscheider in the next hole was so far gone that he did not even slip his trousers down and only bent down, indifferent to everything. Maybe they were sick and maybe they were dying, but men were dying all round. That the corporal had come back from Dmitrevka and brought only half-rations—even that did not worry him

much. It meant hunger, but hunger too was all around and there was nothing else to expect.

Such was Gimpf, like an earthenware jar that at some time or other had been cracked and no longer "rang."

But it was not only the lad from the Ottakring and the man from Remscheid. The Sudeten youth and others were passing blood, and their heads and stomachs ached, and they were so faint that they could not move. The Remscheider, Georg Ketteler, was the worst. He crouched against the clay wall and only got in the way of Ewald Stüwe and Sergeant Urbas, who had to deepen the hole for better cover. Stüwe tried to cheer him up. "If Hooth breaks through we'll get out of the mess."

Ketteler did not even raise his head.

"Then we'll get leave and be in Cologne in time for the Carnival."

Ketteler looked up and attempted a smile. It was a pitiable grimace, and Stüwe realised that he had the Carnival behind him for ever.

That same day Stüwe watched Ketteler wander slowly towards the rear and finally vanish on the white field. He had marched with him from the frontier deep into Russia. Once they had gone on leave and returned together. With them had been Schorsch, who had remained on the other side of the Don. Together the three had got so far. Stüwe was still looking across the field some time after the other had vanished. "Spit on your hands and carry on," said Sergeant Urbas and added: "We shan't see him again."

Ketteler was taken to Dmitrevka with other sick men. But there was no room in Dmitrevka and they had to march as far as the dressing-station at Otorvanovka. This too, was over-crowded, and a number of soldiers were sitting outside the reception room. Ketteler sat down in the snow with them. He sat there till the clay huts faded before his eyes and in their place suddenly stood the row of cottages in distant Remscheid-Hasten. He did not know that hours had gone by when he awoke again from his half-conscious dreaming.

"Next!" he heard a medical orderly angrily repeat, and the nearest man had to nudge him.

He stood before the Medical Officer.

"Diarrhœa too?" asked the M.O.

Ketteler only raised his eyelids and stared sadly with his dull blue eyes.

"Sick-room five!" said the M.O.

Now Ketteler became wide awake. "So I'll be under a roof again! Thank you, Herr Doktor!"

"You're from Remscheid, aren't you?" asked the M.O., recognising his accent.

"Yes, from Remscheid-Hasten."

"Well, go and warm yourself first, Ketteler."

Ketteler was shown into one of the huts. Not only had he a roof over his head; it was warm there too. The fug from the closely-packed bodies was a substitute for heating.

Dr. Bäumler and Dr. Huth were now having a comparatively easy time. Until right into December they had stood at the operation table fifteen and twenty hours a day, and the blood under their feet was never dry. Out of the bandages they had unwrapped from the wounded, grey lines of lice had crawled on to their aprons and bare arms. Now the dressing-station was completely fitted up. The field kitchen was smoking and the entrances were kept clean and stocked—if that can be said of the little that could be done. Walking wounded were sent on to the nearest command to await a lorry to take them to Gumrak hospital, in the direction of Stalingrad. What was to happen to those arriving there from all parts of the ring Bäumler and Huth had no idea, and it was not their business. Sitting wounded were taken on sledges to Pitomnik airfield to be flown out. Most of the seriously wounded remained in the huts, and with the limited resources there their fate was sealed on the spot.

In the middle of December food became scarcer and rations smaller. The main dressing-station often received only half the amount prescribed for fighting troops, so one sledge-horse after another had to be slaughtered. Few wounded were arriving in these days and there were hardly any with shell or mortar or shrapnel wounds. Bäumler remarked once: "Perhaps there's something in this talk of the Russians being at the end of their tether." Huth thought he knew of another reason for the diminishing tank and artillery attacks. "The Russians are occupied elsewhere. There's something going on by Kotelnikovo, there's something happening with Hooth's panzer army." So much he hinted. More than once, in the evening, as Bäumler and Huth sat together in their bunker (built in

the meantime by Russian prisoners), picking off their lice in the light of the lamp and listening to the radio, Huth had been tempted to switch on Moscow or London in the presence of Bäumler, but had always refrained.

Though at this time only a few wounded were arriving from the front, there were still a few new arrivals to be viewed every day. But thorough examinations were scarcely necessary. It was enough to look at the men—pale, hollow-cheeked men with wasted bodies, the only expressive thing about them their wide-open, sad eyes. All, as grown men, were ashamed of the liquid mess running down their legs. And the shame in their eyes and the weak, weeping voices were symptoms. No need to feel the pulse. The pulse was frequent, but rapidly weakening. "Have you got diarrhœa?" The question was superfluous, the smell was enough. There was nothing that called for an examination. The men wanted nothing more than to crawl into some hole; and if there was warmth there, that was everything. And they could be offered warmth: if there were no heated rooms, there was at least the warm fug the sick men gave out.

Clean quarters, tolerable weather conditions, careful disinfection, clean underclothing—these were needed. But the men had lived out there in holes in the snow, and those that had dugouts had lain like sardines in a tin. The broken men that populated the main dressing-station, creatures of skin and bone, crouched rather than lay in the huts, sometimes feverish, sometimes delirious, at other times merely apathetic. They were given hot tea as long as there was any. But apart from that—beet-sugar there was none, biscuits there were none. Concentrated meat soups or wine would have been strengthening, but the horses (they were nearly all gone), gave only a brew without fat. The first deaths from dysentery, from utter weakness, from starvation were only the beginning of a thread to which there would be no end.

Christmas arrived. The German Christmas, the glittering Christmas tree, marzipan, nuts, cakes, silver paper, angels with gilded wings, the aroma of baked apples, golden yellow roast goose, presents and green pine-needles and the laughter of children, and grown-ups becoming children again. Bäumler and Huth both thought of the special importance of this day. Although the remaining horses were urgently needed, Bäumler had another one slaughtered

so that at least on this day the patients might have something to put into their empty stomachs. From the supply depot he had received enough chocolate to distribute one bar to every five men.

In the afternoon he made a special tour of the huts.

"Well, how are you getting on?" was his question.

All were doing tolerably well.

"Ach, I'm all right!"—"It's so good to be here in the warm!"—"I'm much better, Herr Doktor!"—"I'll be all right, Herr Doktor!" Such were the answers that Bäumler heard. When a man complained of pains, or that he had no room to stretch himself, or that he had not been flown out, it was not one of the sick, but one of the wounded who still had his physical strength. The sick did not complain. The weakest felt neither pain nor hunger. They sat there dozing, dreaming, and answered in weak voices or by raising their large glittering eyes. One, about to pass over, breathed: "It'll be all right now, Herr Doktor."

Huth, too, visited the patients. It was already dark, and every hut had received a Hindenburg light. Huth looked into one of the rooms. In the dim light no single face was distinguishable; there was only a dim grey substance covering the floor, and the wheezing of mucus-clogged air-passages and sick lungs. Without announcing himself Huth passed on. In the next hut and in the third there was the same thick atmosphere, and the presence of human beings was only to be guessed at. Huth called to a few of the men and heard their answers. Then he went on his way. Outside he inhaled deeply the cold winter air. He strolled over to the other side and entered one of the clay huts. Formerly, perhaps, when in summer the half-open shed in the yard and the empty sheep-pen had been used as dwelling-places and in winter all had huddled together, a family of a dozen persons might have lived here, occupying all the available space. Now there were four dozen sick, bleeding, dying German soldiers. And because it was Christmas they had a Hindenburg light—a tiny wick in a little cardboard box filled with tallow, that would burn for an hour, after which all would sink back into darkness.

Bäumler had a bottle of cognac left and was now opening it. They talked about Christmas, about the previous Christmas, which Bäumler had spent in Kharkhov and Huth on leave in Berlin. And they discussed a staff-M.O.

in the neighbouring Dmitrevka. This staff-M.O., whose name was Unde, had formerly been with a panzer regiment and apparently always been so far behind the troops that he had not received a single decoration. Now that the Stalingrad army was surrounded and there was talk of early relief he had considered the time ripe to do something about it. He had volunteered for Stalingrad, to be there when relief should arrive and when, in due course, the particularly valuable "Stalingrad Order" would be distributed. He had been flown in and had been astonished on seeing the primitive dugouts around the Pitomnik airfield. And arriving at Dmitrevka he was shocked to find himself on the open field. The reality corresponded all too little with the conception of the "citadel of Stalingrad" that he had got from newspaper reports.

"I bet he was surprised at Dmitrevka!"

"They didn't even have a dugout there at first."

"They're all very satisfied with him now. He spends most of the time in his bunker. Keeps having it deepened and strengthened."

"Where does he get the material from?"

"Has it fetched out of other bunkers."

"But there are other fellows in them!"

"Yes, but they're only soldiers. What does Staff-M.O. Unde care about them?"

"Well, what do they matter to Unde, or to me?" answered Huth.

Later they turned on the radio and heard music from Berlin. Once more they were disturbed; but this time it was no Russian "sewing machine." It was the heavy rumble of artillery reverberating through the clear frosty air from the south. There was an attack on Marinovka and Karpovka. As the two left their bunker they saw a glow on the southern horizon.

"Perhaps it's Hooth's tanks—perhaps they've reached the ring. The ring was to be opened by Christmas," said Bäumler.

"Then Staff-M.O. Unde'll get his 'Stalingrad Order'—but I don't think it is," replied Huth.

The firing on Karpovka and Marinovka lasted ten minutes, then the night suddenly fell back into silence. A few more times the silence was broken by the hum of a "sewing machine," but that was all.

Bäumler and Huth again sat in the dugout. The Grossdeutsche Rundfunk announced itself with a so-called "round" broadcast. Berlin, Frankfurt-am-Main and Königsberg called one or another sector of the front—called Narvik, Misurate, Tunisia, Velikie Luki, Stalingrad.

"Calling Stalingrad!"

"This is Kharkov. . . . This is Stalingrad!"

"Ladies and Gentlemen! This is Stalingrad calling. We are on the bank of the Volga. Before us stretches the snow-covered silver-grey ribbon of the mighty river. Here stand the men of Stalingrad, the German watch on the Volga. The rumbling you have just heard is the firing from the Russian trenches on the other side. The Russians are preparing something, they mean to disturb our Christmas festivities.

"But there is the lieutenant. A splendid, a typical figure of our glorious Wehrmacht. Steel helmet on his head, hand-grenades at the belt. A moment ago, down in the cosy bunker, his eyes were on the glittering Christmas tree. Now they are peering through the driving snow into the hostile winter night. The lieutenant turns smartly to his men: 'Chinstraps tight!' You ought to see them now, the lieutenant and his men, these vigorous German faces and the change that takes place in these faces! The tightening of the chinstrap has a singular effect, man and helmet become as it were a physical unit, one might almost say. . . ."

Staff-M.O. Bäumler groaned.

"What's up, Bäumler?"

"That's not Stalingrad speaking!" "No, it certainly isn't. Maybe it's Kharkov or even Berlin; anyway it's a swindle!" Huth knew how that sort of thing was done, for here too he had had a look behind the scenes.

The broadcast went on. The man in Kharkhov or Berlin, or wherever he was, was still on chinstraps. ". . . and the inner man prepared too, braces himself—ladies, you ought to *see* the men—crouches for the spring. And if any man's courage should begin to ebb—the chinstray holds his jaws tight. . . ."

"Want to hear any more, Bäumler?"

"No, that's enough. Switch off!"

But Huth did not switch off. He knew the broadcasting times of various stations. He turned the knob to another wavelength and they heard, again in German, reports of

great German losses near Kotelnikovo (it concerned Hooth's tanks), of battles near Morosovskaya, Tazinskaya, Millerovo (mein Gott, Millerovo! Where does the front run now?), of the encirclement of German forces by Velikie Luki. . . ."

"Want to hear any more, Bäumler?"

"Yes, keep it on!" replied Bäumler darkly. And from that day on both, when they sat alone in their dugout, also listened to the Russian war reports and to broadcasts from London.

Huth made one more tour through the cold winter night—past the reception and operating rooms, where half the medical company were sleeping on stretchers or on the floor while the other half stood on guard; past the huts which, with no more Hindenburg lights burning, were now in total darkness; past the parking-place with its few sledges and its group of shaggy ponies, heads pressed together, a grey mound in the snow. Only the white vapour puffing out of the nostrils betrayed that there was life in the ice-crusted mound.

Huth returned to the bunker and lay down.

The land was as it had come from the hand of Nature and as fire and water and ice had shaped it—in the west the Don, in the east the Volga, in the south the Karpovka; the Rossoshka Hills running parallel to the Don and sloping down to the Rossoshka rivulet, in the south a low table-land parallel to the Karpovka and sloping down to the Karpovka valley; in the east, flanking the Volga, more hilly country, and between, like an empty saucer, the blizzard-lashed steppe with its few cracks and ravines.

The snow-swept white saucer, stretching to the Volga bend and the ruins of Stalingrad, was the battlefield. Its edges, at first held by the divisions, became the scene of the doom of the 6th Army.

The land was a barren waste. Traces of man, who had lived and made his abode here, were obliterated.

The German soldier, here to replace the inhabitants, found no shelter. The staffs lived in dugouts among the ruins of the steppe villages, and the soldiers lay forward in holes in the ground, sometimes only in the snow, sometimes under the open sky. Never before had there been such masses of humanity between Don and Volga, and never before had Death reaped such a harvest there.

In a dugout on a slope of the Rossoshka hills a frosty-grey face bent over another equally gnawed by the murderous cold.

"Matthias, are you awake?"

"Yes, August!"

One lay on a bunk, the other stood before it. The one on the bunk, staring at the dugout roof, was Matthias Gimpf. The one standing in front of him and laying a handful of old rags on the wooden bunk was August Gnotke. Sergeant Gnotke hesitated a moment, as if about to say something to the man lying there in cap, greatcoat and boots, then he turned away. He buttoned his great-coat, wrapped up his head, ears and neck, and left the dugout.

An hour Gnotke had to stand on guard.

Two hours in the dugout, one hour forward in the trench: to that extent life had become normal again. Now there were sentry duties, and sergeants had to take their turn. Gnotke had collar-badge and shoulder-titles again, had even had to sew them on; but that didn't mean much. He was as ragged as the others; even his feet were wrapped in rags like the rest. A bit of ribbon on the collar made no difference, and the duties were the same for sergeants as for men.

Christmas was now long past. The time limit set for a break-out attempt to the west had also gone by without anything done. On Christmas night the soldiers had left their snow-holes and drawn nearer to the slope. Here they had found a trench and a former Russian dugout, which had later been widened by men of the rear services. And because Georg Ketteler had wandered off to Otorvanovka, and the lad from Billerbeck, the man from Hohengüstrow and some others had been buried in the snow farther west, here in the bunker there was room for all. It was not like the dugout finished in the last two or three days next to the snowholes, where there had been room for only a few men at a time.

It was now January, and the ice-grey mist came from the east, from the Volga. When the wind ceased its play with the grey ragged clouds and blew flat along the ground it came not only from the east but from all directions, sweeping the steppe clear and driving hard frozen snow-flakes into the face. That day the earth was swept bare and was grey with frost. All the snow that had lain on

the ground was driving by in the air. And in the driving snow hung a dull white ball, the only fixed point visible in the ceaselessly moving scene—the sun.

A face appeared at Gnotke's side. Bluish lips, a big nose, spectacles on the nose. It was the sentry from the other end of the trench.

"*Ach*, I'm starving. That soup again to-day. . ."

Gnotke sought the eyes behind the spectacles. In those eyes he saw what must come and could not be prevented. If not at this hour, it would happen in the next. The man standing there with hunched shoulders had been a teacher of drawing, but he would never be a teacher of drawing again.

"I counted the peas in the soup. Fourteen—the rest was just water. Haven't they got any more horses?"

Gnotke looked him straight in the eyes.

"And the damned lice! Out here it's not so bad, but you mustn't go into the warm." He really wanted to say something else. "Are you tired too?"

"Yes," said Gnotke.

They stood side by side looking out into the grey wind. The snow was driving flat over the ground. Both had their faces and eyes at ground level, and the scene before them was partly obscured by the camouflage of twigs stuck in the ground.

"What weather! No man, not even a Russian, can keep his eyes open. It must succeed to-day!" That was a suggestion and the teacher awaited an answer. Gnotke continued to stare into the driving snow. The other turned round and went back to his post.

So Leichenaugust* (as Gnotke was called in the company) wouldn't play! Now the teacher was staring through his own spyhole. No longer with the attentive eyes of a few days before when he had still found the serenity to make a sketch of the foreground with long even strokes on a piece of paper—a sketch of that barren ground with the high mound of a horse's carcase that now filled all his thoughts.

After a while Gnotke noticed that the teacher had left his post. He spotted him outside the trench, body pressed to the ground, working himself forward inch by inch. Gnotke

* "Corpses" August.

knew what would happen. The teacher was not the first to go that way.

A fortnight earlier sappers nearby had been hunting a lean horse. Unfortunately the fleeing animal had run between the lines and been shot dead from the other side. The carcase still lay there like a little mound covered with rime. Near this grey mound three other dark patches were visible in clear weather. Two of these were sappers who had not wished to give up their quarry; the third was a man of Gnotke's company who had ventured out and had also been hit by the bullet of a Russian sniper.

Now the teacher was on the way.

"You must fight to the last bullet!" the Führer had called to his soldiers; and a hundred times they were sent in to the attack to stem the flood and to avert the further crumbling of their island. "Hold on, I'll do all in my power to hammer you out!" their Führer had cried to them; and they held on. First they ate the horses of the Rumanian cavalry, then those of their own artillery and horse-pounds. First they received one loaf to four men, then one loaf to seven men, then 200 grammes (one finger-thick slice) of bread per man daily. They held on, believing the words of their Führer and hoping for relief.

They hoped for the arrival of General Hooth's panzer army; then they set all their hopes on a military operation inside the ring. But neither from outside nor from inside was the ring opened. New rumours and new hopes flickered up in the dugouts—China had declared war on England and America, so had Turkey and Spain, it was said. That would change the whole world position and bring their own salvation. But Manstein's tanks were defeated, China was far away, and now there was no more talk of Turkey and Spain.

Fewer "Junkers" were arriving; their flying distances were getting longer. Arriving and departing, they were being shot down in dozens. On the steppe between Don and Donetz lay a crashed plane with mailbags out of the Stalingrad ring; and what those letters contained was one great shriek of agony.

"Dear Karoline, I'm fairly fit, at least I'm carrying on as long as I can. I'm in an awful place and there's no telling how things are going to turn out."

"Dear Herbert, It was a black day for us. The 10th is broken up and things are very bad with us—Georg

Hartung, Otto Gnussel, Gesich, Wahler, Dusch, Lieutenant Hey, all killed, about forty men wounded."

"Dear Mother and Father, There's some very hard fighting and we've had heavy losses, the cemeteries get bigger from day to day."

Now December had gone by and January had begun. Letters were no longer being written, and not many would have been written even if the "Junkers" had still been able to maintain a regular service.

"My dear wife, I don't feel like doing anything, not even writing. . . ." None of them felt like doing anything. They wrote no more letters and made no more diary entries; all that lay behind them. They were all in an "awful place." Bodies were covered with ulcers, and lice were eating into the ulcers. They were hungry and had not enough to fill the void in their stomachs; they had fever and diarrhœa and retching and limbs black with frost, and there were no more pills and no more injections. Pain, and the stench from open wounds, was often the only narcotic. The faces of wives and children at home appeared to these fevered men like shadowy images that had no real existence. They were all "finished," not only their feet but their intestines, kidneys, lungs and hearts too. And yet the verdict of battalion M.O.s, and regimental, divisional, and army group commanders was: "In the present circumstances the man is fit for duty!" So they stood hour after hour on guard, staggered again and again in fruitless attacks against Soviet positions; they died like horses in the shafts, or they survived and fell back again into the half-darkness of their dugouts.

Such were Gnotke's surroundings, near and far. As he stood there staring over the snow-swept field he thought of faces that were gone and of hopes that had survived them and now accompanied others on the way to oblivion. His eyes again sought the drawing-master who was nothing but a grey smudge on the ground, moving so cautiously that it was some time before Gnotke realised that he was slowly approaching his goal. This drawing-master had a wife, children, a house, and beehives behind the house; and now he was risking wife and children and life for a piece of horse-flesh. Gnotke had tried to dissuade him, but in vain. The carcase was more tempting than any thoughts of wife, children, or home.

Gnotke thought of Stüwe, who had swollen feet, who

scarcely spoke after his friend from Remscheid had gone. and who, with all his other misfortunes, had broken his spectacles too. Gnotke thought of the red-haired Sergeant Urbas lying on his bunk with a strange malady; he thought of that piece of cracked earthenware, Gimpf. So he had not been with the front-line troops at Vyasma but on guard duty in the rear, and on this guard duty something had happened to him that was more catastrophic than the punishment squad or anything else! So much Gnotke had got out of him.

The drawing-master had reached the horse's carcase. He raised his knife and cut out a piece of flesh. Gnotke strained his ears. He heard nothing but the howling of the wind and saw nothing through the driving snow but the movement of the hand with the knife. Perhaps he'll be lucky and get through with it! he thought. But at the same moment a shot rang out.

. . . . .

It was the 8th of January, at the northern bolt position some thirty kilometres from Gnotke's dugout. Here too was driving snow and here too the sun hung like a low window in the shifting layers of mist.

Lieutenant Lawkow, a little, pock-marked fellow, had a telephone receiver in his hand and was shouting excitedly: "Are you crazy, man? Can't you see they're negotiators, with a white flag?"

"Doesn't matter—they're Russians, so we fire!" came the answer from the next trench.

Lieutenant Lawkow was battalion adjutant, but because the battalion commander had reported sick and gone to the rear he was temporarily in change of the battalion. He laid the receiver down, cursed his neighbour in the next trench and again stared over the top of the trench into the driving snow. He could see a white flag fluttering in the wind and withdrawing under a sputter of rifle-shots.

Lieutenant Lawkow called the regiment and learned that the lieutenant in the neighbouring trench had acted correctly: according to an army order negotiators were to be driven off by fire. The regimental commander himself spoke, and listened to Lawkow's report. Half an hour later the commander, Colonel Lundt, arrived in the forward trench.

Another half-hour, and the Russian negotiators were

there again. Once more a large white flag fluttered in the wind; once more a bugle sounded over the snowfield. This time there were no rifle-shots. Colonel Lundt sent Lieutenant Lawkow to meet the Russians. Lawkow guided them along a lane through the minefield across no-man's-land into the German lines. There were two Russian officers and a bugler. They informed the Colonel that in the name of the Soviet High Command they were to deliver a document to the Commander-in-Chief of the German 6th Army.

Colonel Lundt had them blindfolded, led them to his car and drove with them to his regimental staff. Here he rang up Army H.O. and spoke with the chief of staff and with the commander-in-chief. Then he requested the Russian officers to hand him the document for delivery and to regard themselves as his guests until he returned.

Colonel Lundt entered his car, drove to Pitomnik aerodrome and on along the Gumrak road to some bunkers at the end of the airfield. These bunkers had formerly belonged to a Russian ack-ack detachment and were now occupied by the German Army H.Q.

The document laid before the commander-in-chief read:—

"To the Commander-in-Chief of the German 6th Army, Colonel-General Paulus, or his representative, and to all the officers and men of the encircled German forces before Stalingrad.

"The German 6th Army, the Units of the 4th Panzer Army, and the reinforcements sent to you have been completely surrounded since the 23rd of November, 1942.

"The troops of the Red Army have enclosed these German army groups in an unbreakable ring. All hope of rescuing your troops by an offensive of the German Army from the south and south-west have proved unavailing: the German forces hastening to your aid have been defeated by the Red Army, and the remains of these troops are retreating towards Rostov.

"The German fleet of transport planes, which brought you a starvation ration of food, ammunition and petrol, has been forced by the rapid advance of the Red Army frequently to change its flying-grounds and to fly from greater distances to the region of the surrounded troops.

Moreover, the German fleet of transport planes is suffering enormous losses of machines and crews, inflicted by the Russian Air Force. Their help for the surrounded troops is becoming ineffectual.

"The situation of your surrounded troops is desperate. They are suffering from hunger, cold and sickness. The grim Russian winter has scarcely begun. Severe frosts, cold winds and blizzards are yet to come; and your soldiers are not provided with winter clothing and are living in hard, unhealthy conditions.

"You as Commander-in-Chief and all officers of the surrounded troops are fully aware that you possess no real means of breaking out of the ring. Your situation is hopeless and further resistance senseless.

"In view of the hopeless situation that has developed for you, and in order to avoid needless bloodshed, we suggest your acceptance of the following terms of surrender. 1. All the surrounded troops with you and your staff at their head to cease resistance. 2. Your entire forces with all weapons, ammunition, armaments, transports and supplies to be handed over intact to our army authorities.

"To all officers and soldiers ceasing resistance we guarantee life and security, and after the end of the war their return to Germany or to any country to which the prisoners-of-war desire to go.

"All Wehrmacht members among the surrendering troops will be allowed to retain their military uniforms, badges of rank and decorations, personal property and valuables. The senior officers' corps may also retain their swords.

"All surrendering officers, N.C.O.s and men will immediately receive normal rations.

"All wounded and sick will be given medical aid.

"Your written answer, to be delivered by a representative personally nominated by you, will be awaited on the 9th of January, 1943, at 10.00 hours Moscow time. Your representative is to drive in a motor-car with a white flag along the road to Konny junction, Kotluban station. Your representative will be met in region 'B,' 0.5 kilometre south-east of Junction 564, on the 9th of January, 1943, at 10.00 hours, by Russian plenipotentiary commanders.

"Should you decline our offer of surrender we hereby notify you that the troops of the Red Army and the Red

Air Force will be forced to proceed to the destruction of the surrounded German troops. For their destruction, however, you will bear the responsibility.

(Signed) Voronov,
Colonel-General of Artillery,
Representative of High Command H.Q., Red Army.

(Signed) Rokossovski, Lt.-General,
Commanding Russian Forces on the Don Front."

. . . . .

Neither Sergeant Gnotke nor any of the men of the Stalingrad western front, or at the northern bolt position, could know at that moment that a new, black page would be turned in their book of fate; that on the following day at 10.00 hours their final destruction would begin. In the trench where Gnotke stood and on the territory before his eyes only a single shot was fired that day. This shot fell by the dead horse and made a little momentary fountain of snow. The arm that had been moving there, and the hand that had cut a piece of flesh out of the carcase, fell back. Thereafter all remained as it had been and all looked as it had looked before, except that a fourth motionless figure, that to-morrow would be half buried, a dark smudge like the other three, now showed itself through the driving snow.

Half an hour passed and Gnotke was relieved.

The relieving sentry, a bent, mummified figure with dull eyes blinking out of the cloth hood, was Lance-Corporal Liebich, a clerk from Merseburg, in Thüringia, who at Vertyatchi had still belonged to the staff company and felt the sudden descent into thunder and darkness more keenly than the others. It was Gnotke's duty to report to him that all was well, or to tell him what was not in order. But he merely pointed with a brief gesture into the driving snow at the dead horse where by the already familiar dark smudges a fourth was now visible.

Liebich understood.

" Dingelstedt? he asked, and Gnotke nodded.

Heinrich Dingelstedt was the name of the teacher from Zwischenahn, on Lake Zwischenahn, in Oldenburg. Before returning to his dugout Gnotke had to report his disappearance and what he had seen to the sergeant-major in charge of the guard. Sergeant-Major Pöhls, until a few days ago still a sergeant-cook with the staff company in

the rear, entered the name "Dingelstedt" in his notebook. Details he did not want, and he was glad that the taciturn Gnotke was reporting it. The mere mention of the horse carcase brought perspiration out on his forehead. And the uneasy motion he suddenly felt in his intestines was not imagination, even if the M.O. in Otorvanovka *had* said that his diarrhœa was attributable to central causes in the brain, to emotions such as fear or fright, and that the change of locality to the front could only improve and possibly cure his condition.

That day the company commander, Captain von Hollwitz, had to strike two men off his strength: a soldier who had died in the night and been buried in the snow that morning, and Lance-Corporal Dingelstedt. Now the company numbered 32—1 officer, 5 N.C.O.s and 26 men.

Six weeks before, von Hollwitz had led a company of some 300 men, made up half from the staff company and half from scattered troops, out of Vertyatchi and across the Don. Enemy action, hunger and sickness had decimated them. Now it was time to think of when there would be not a man left to hold a gun.

"The barrack-room is the home of the soldier and should look like a home." Thus it stands in garrison and barrack-room regulations. West of Stalingrad the snow-hole, the hole in the ground, in rare cases the dugout, was the home of the soldier. And by that same token the earth bunker in which Gnotke was senior had been fitted out. Huts in the neighbouring villages had had to contribute doors and windows plus doorways and window-frames and other fittings, tables and forms. In the bunker a door could be a door or it could be something else, and windows in their frames with carved shutters attached seemed made to be bookcases. This bunker had been taken over from the Russians and improved, and its first German occupants must have had a touch of imagination when they painted with tar "Villa Winterfrieden" on the entrance door. But whatever they might have had in mind it was as transient as themselves, for there was no sign of it now. The steps that Gnotke was descending had been trodden out in the ground, the original wooden steps having been removed and used as firewood. All the forms but one, the built-in cupboards and even the wooden walls had also found their way into the stove and ended in smoke. The previous night the bunk—it had been the door of a

peasant hut—of the soldier who had that morning been buried in the snow, had also been put on the fire. When Gnotke came down into the bunker and went to Dingelstedt's bunk to collect the teacher's property in the dim light that penetrated through a shaft, several eyes were raised to observe his occupation. When he returned a little later even Dingelstedt's bunk was dismantled and Private Altenhuden was chopping it up for firewood with his bayonet.

Gnotke crouched by the still cold stove. Looking up, he noticed that Gimpf was lying on his bunk in the same position as before, when Gnotke had gone on guard. Gimpf had not taken off his boots, nor touched the rags that had been laid ready for him; he was still staring at the roof. His was not merely a case of slightly frost-bitten feet: as with Sergeant-Major Pöhls, there were central causes located in the brain. His condition could hardly have been caused by fear or fright, even by the fear of death, for Gimpf had lost that kind of fear since the days of the punishment squad.

Altenhuden brought an armful of firewood. "Firewood, and just now it was still a bunk. Well, he won't need one any more."

"No, he won't need one any more," repeated Gnotke.

That was Lance-Corporal Dingelstedt's obituary.

"Good thing too if we can have a fire again," came a bright voice, that of Corporal Riess.

"Shut your mouth, Riess!" said Gnotke angrily. "You'd have done better if you'd brought some horse-meat!"

Altenhuden banked up the fire. The fire-bucket, a converted petrol tin, began to glow; smoke came out of the holes and rose through the chimney. There were only two things that could awaken a bunker to life: a Soviet attack or a heated stove. Of a third, eating together, there could be no question now, nor had there been for some time. But when there was an attack they all went, no matter how bad they felt, for to lose the bunker would mean to lose everything. Outside the bunker was the blizzard-swept steppe.

This time the occasion was a heated stove. Altenhuden did not spare the wood; he rammed in as much as there was room for. In this hole, with its layers of chalk and clay and walls like frozen granite, even the acrid smoke was

agreeable. Though there was no radiating warmth the smoke drifting along the walls to the exit made a homely atmosphere, and the men lying like dried flies on their bunks stirred a little. Then even roused themselves. Tünnes was the first to climb down from his bunk and and crouch by the stove. A second, third and fourth followed, and from outside came Liebich and the other off-duty sentries.

Gnotke had put a pot of water on the fire, and when the water was hot he took it to Gimpf's bunk. He nudged Gimpf. Under Gnotke's eyes Gimpf could not do otherwise than unwrap his rags and take off his shoes, and lay the hot rags handed to him round his cold blue feet. Gnotke had already told him that healthy feet are more important than a healthy head. Now, seeing the condition of the feet, Gnotke said, "Better than Tünnes's—better than Kalbach's." Tünnes's feet were badly swollen as a result of hunger; Kalbach's were swollen and misshapen through hunger and weakening of the heart.

Gimpf brought another pot of hot water, for Gimpf could lie on his bunk and let the hot compresses take effect a little longer. Gnotke did not take over his hour of sentry duty, but he exchanged with him so that Gimpf would not have to go out until later.

When Gotke returned from his second hour on guard the night was already over. A few men still sat round the stove; others had returned to their bunks. The light of the fire flickered across the faces of those sitting around, played on the roof and walls of the bunker, and from time to time lit up those lying stretched out or with their knees drawn up in the mist and darkness.

As Gnotke entered he heard someone say: "We must think ourselves lucky—if the Russians had managed to do what they intended. . . ." The speaker paused and added: "Anyhow, we're still alive."

"We're still alive!" came an answer out of the darkness.

Another voice said: "Satan's shut us in—there's nothing to do but pray."

No one else spoke, and all was quiet again. The man who had triumphed over the Russians and was "still alive" was Kalbach, with the heart trouble and the swollen feet. The one who no longer believed in Russians or even in a Führer, who believed only in prayer, was Corporal August Fell. Gnotke found a place among those

by the stove. They did not move as he sat down. They sat there with their straggling beards that seemed unreal, as if stuck on, and hung their heads. Those crouching on the bunks stared at their drawn-up knees. Those lying stretched out stared at the red patches on the roof.

The orgy of warmth, that had flickered here for an hour, was over. They might have used the gift of warmth differently. Like Altenhuden, for example, who had taken off his shirt, picked off 230 lice and thrown them into a tin of water in front of him. They could have washed their foot-rags and darned their socks; or like Gimpf (after Gnotke had pushed him into it) they might have looked after their feet, on which their lives would soon depend. But they had savoured the warmth and the unusual quiet of the trench in front as at other times they might have savoured a generous portion of schnaps, and that was how both had seemed. Once more they had drawn on all the hopes that for weeks had had to sustain them. There was no more talk of Manstein's tanks, for by now that was a hack ridden to death. But with their own eyes they had all seen a huge glow in the west. Corporal Riess, though he had returned from the ration store without any horse-meat, had brought an explanation of this red glow. "That shows you it's right," he said. "There's fighting beyond the ring. The Russians are still in Kalatch, but there's a whole S.S. army charging at it!" Even Sergeant Urbas had butted in—Urbas, who lay there with a "raving sickness" so that one never knew what to make of him. Sometimes he lay like a log on his bunk, stupidly counting his fingers and hearing nothing, even if one shouted at him; sometimes he was like a lynx and heard every whisper and butted into everything and raved till he got blue in the face and fell back again and moved no more. Several times they'd thought he was dead. He'd lain like that to-day, but when Riess spoke about the S.S. army being in Kalatch Urbas had suddenly thrown off his blanket, greatcoat and everything he had on him, swung his legs over the bunk and sat there with bleary blue face and yelled: "Yes, that's certain, I know it is! They're over the bridge already, and they'll smash through too!" They didn't want to look at Urbas or hear what he said, even thought he might be right for once, and they were glad when, after yelling some more nonsense, he fell back again like a corpse. Altenhuden laid the feet, that still hung

outside, back on the bunk and covered Urbas again with blanket and greatcoat. Now they had a rest from his yelling, and Riess could go on telling them what he'd heard at the ration-depot. And afterwards August Fell put his hands together and said: "Listen, everybody. I'm making a vow and I'll keep it. If it's true and I get home safely I'll give 100 marks for the collection plate." And Kalbach and Liebich and Riess and Liebsch and Gimpf and Altenhuden and Tünnes—all contributed something to fan their common hope until the iron ring was almost opened, Stalingrad taken, the Russians finally thrown into the Volga.

"Look how the Russian fights, so fierce and obstinate —that can mean all sorts of things."

"He just doesn't mean to give up Stalingrad, but it must fall sooner or later."

"We've got nine-tenths of it, there's only little groups fighting there, but they're dug in so deep it's almost impregnable."

"And when he attacks in large numbers they're all convicts and the commissars drive them forward with whips."

"Sooner or later the Russians will have had enough. They can't stand those huge losses for ever."

So they talked. The Russians' "huge losses" were to make their own huge losses seem smaller, and their talk of "hunger in the Russian lines" was to make them forget the emptiness in their own stomachs—and failed to do so. Liebich had sprung up and cried: "See, it's been absolutely quiet round here for days!"

"Not for days, damn it!" said Sergeant Maulhard. In a trench assault three days before he had been shot in the stern, and since then he had been lying hour after hour on his belly, waiting to be taken away to the dressing-station. He lay with a rising temperature and with an emergency bandage that a stretcher-bearer had put on. There was no morphia injection for him. A medical orderly had told him that the anti-tetanus injection he had received months before for a slight wound would still be taking effect to-day and possibly protect him from lockjaw; and he was clinging to this hope. Now, at this hour, when they had warmed themselves and drawn on all their remaining hopes, Maulhard was as uninspiring a sight as Sergeant Urbas, and they had no wish to hear anything

from him. They preferred to turn to Corporal Riess again and hear what else he had brought back from the regiment.

Riess, like Liebsch and the sergeant-major, had formerly belonged to the staff company. That day, waiting vainly for hours for the meat ration, he had sat playing *vingt-et-un* with his old comrades and finally come back without any horse-meat. He knew quite a lot more, and one by one he trotted out his latest "tips."

Altenhuden stoked the fire again. Though the men in the bunker had been in the iron ring fifty days and fifty times had seen their hopes smashed, they gathered the pieces and set them up for the fifty-first time. So in a week or so they'd be able to use the normal post again and send letters home! In about five days, round about the 15th or 16th of January, the decision must come, as sure as that Hitler was the Führer and as sure as that the Führer would keep his word!

"We're true to him—he'll be true to us," said Riess.

"It's bad here, but it was worse last winter in the Valdai Hills—and yet they got out," remembered Corporal Fell.

"Still, I'd like to know why we didn't break out on the 3rd like they said we would," said Altenhuden.

"No need to," replied Riess. "We stay where we are and we'll be hammered out from outside."

And Riess again: "As H.Q. tells us, we'll be able to get out of the ring by the 26th of January at the latest. And then of course there'll be leave, first for those with most children, and then for everybody."

"The Führer said so. . . ."

"So we stand firm, not one step back, and we know for certain that we'll be free again."

"And Emil, is that right they've already drawn up a plan?" someone asked Riess.

"Yes, a plan to send us all home on leave by air. . . ."

It was all true; they had only to stretch out their hands to grasp it. Thus they sat round the stove, with hair uncut for weeks and matted with filth, with straggling beards, their eyes glittering with hunger. The end of their suffering was near, and pain and dying would not have been in vain. They had "defended" the citadel of Stalingrad and held out to the end, till relief and freedom came. To-morrow all would be changed; they would be aeroplane passengers, would be made a fuss of by women and children, by the

whole nation. It was all true, for in their bunker the red moon had risen.

That was before Gnotke entered. As he sat down among those at the fire it was all over. There was no more wood, it had all been burned The fire had died down and the red glow on the roof was duller. Fell, who had spoken of prayer as the only hope, and Kalbach, who had said they were " still alive," already lay on their bunks. Liebich and Riess were the two who had not moved up when Gnotke sought room beside them. They could not stand his steady eyes. Gnotke, for his part, could not help it if Liebich looked to him like a wax dummy with straggly hairs stuck on its chin; nor could he help thinking how pale Riess's blue eyes would some day look. They soon got up and climbed on to their bunks. Only Altenhuden remained seated with Gnotke; and both fell asleep by the dying embers.

Once Gnotke awoke.

" That swine Liebsch again! " someone had shouted. It was Tünnes.

" Don't make such a row! " came another voice in the darkness; but Tünnes did not calm down at once.

" Obstinate as a mule—too lazy to get up and undo his trousers and have a piss outside! When you're underneath you get the lot! " he growled, and in the dull light of the feeble petroleum lamp he could be seen standing up and shaking his canvas But of Liebsch nothing could be seen or heard. Liebsch did not move.

That was nothing, it happened every day. Gnotke went to sleep again.

. . . . .

On the 19th of November, 1942, the Deputy Quartermaster of the 6th German Army had 330,000 men on his strength. By the 10th of January, 1943—in fifty-one days —he had struck off 140,000 that had been wiped out by Russian weapons, by hunger, cold and disease.

330,000 minus 140,000. 190,000 men left.

On the 10th of January, 1943, that number began their flight over the empty frozen steppe. On the 10th of January, 1943, at 10.00 hours—the hour when the capitulation term offered by the Soviet High Command expired—the dissolution began.

In Gnotke's dugout it began ten minutes earlier. The finger of Private Altenhuden touched off the incipient

chaos. It was his right index finger that he laid on a red blotch, a blotch the shape and size of a lentil, on the neck of Sergeant Urbas. He drew back his finger : the blotch had vanished under the pressure but immediately returned. Altenhuden did not know that he was holding his finger stretched out while he flicked open the shirt of Urbas lying there with half-closed eyes. On the bared chest were the same red blotches. Now Altenhuden stared at his index-finger as if it had picked up something that could not be wiped away and would run through his veins and would grip his heart and brain. He stared at Urbas. The whites of Urbas's half-closed eyes gleamed pink, the face was bleary, the wide nostrils black, black, too, the thick lips and bared teeth, and the spluttering breath stank. Altenhuden started back, hid his finger under his armpit and said tonelessly : " Typhus! "

" Typhus! " echoed another.

" The stupid beast! "

" Course he's stupid, wouldn't even eat his slice of bread! "

" Headache and cold and fever, and now this! " a babel of stammering, helpless, agitated voices.

There it was, the disease of beleaguered towns, of beaten armies, of lands sucked dry; and no one knew what to do. It was a few minutes before ten o'clock. Earth-grey was the light that penetrated into the dugout, and earth-grey were the faces of the soldiers standing round the sergeant's bunk.

" What are we to do? "

" He must be got away at once—stretcher-bearers! "

But where were the stretcher-bearers to take him away, and where were they to take him? To Otorvanovka, where for days there had been no room for Sergeanst Maulhard shot in the buttocks? To Pitomnik airfield to be flown out? To the field hospital at Gumrak, where sick men were crowded out on to the road and dying in tents?

" The stupid beast! " said Corporal Riess again. " It's his own fault, he shouldn't have drunk that unboiled snow water, it's strictly forbidden! "

" Don't talk drivel—he must be got away! What are we to do? "

Corporal Riess, former S.S. man and last year S.S. camp guard in the General Government, Poland, knew the radical treatment for typhus : a bullet behind the ear and fourteen feet under the ground with lime on top! " Report

it and isolate him first," he said. "We'll lay him out in the snow for now."

But Sergeant Urbas who, as supplies sergeant from the Suvalki salient to the Moscow region, had seen much from the Dniester via Kiev, Kharkhov, Rostov and Kalatch to the Don and Volga steppes, also knew of certain methods and practices. It had never occurred to him that he himself could be the object of such methods of extermination as were practised on sick-camp inmates and sick civilians; and it is uncertain whether he had understood anything of the exchange of words about him. But as he suddenly raised himself and swung his legs over the edge of the bunk and opened his eyes to the grey haze of faces staring at him—then he understood much and, shaking with fever, head swimming, almost deaf, he heard what they were thinking. He heard the secretive tone in the words of Riess and saw the pitiful faces of the others and the fear lurking in their eyes.

"Man! Urbas!" shouted Riess. This shout of his own name brought Urbas to himself and gave him something like a lucid moment.

Urbas was a creature surrounded by the helplessness and malice of a pack of hungry wolves! In the haze of men and objects his eyes lighted on one fixed point: the petrol can that served as a fire bucket. To slip down from the bunk, grab the can of wood ashes, pull it down over Riess's head and bang it out of shape with his fists was the work of a moment. The smoke-tube fell down and filled the room with flying black soot. Urbas blundered against the the table and in a moment it was smashed under the hammering of his fists. In a mad rage of hands and feet anything he grasped became a weapon or missile and anyone within reach got simultaneous blows and kicks. A short, stocky fellow was Urbas, his bristly grey hair grown long and soft, overhanging the red eyes and bleared face. He had been a packer and then storekeeper with a Leipzig export firm, had a wife called Brigitte at home, and a son also at the front.

The Urbas in the bunker was not the Urbas of Leipzig with a wife and son and a three-roomed home and a kitchen-garden and an arbour. He was not the Sergeant Urbas who could pass unmoved by gallows of hanged men and women or drive in his supply convoy by mass graves he knew to be filled with the corpses of fallen men.

The Urbas in the bunker felt the blows he was striking and felt them painfully. A desperate man going under he howled and screamed; sweat poured from his face and foam broke from his mouth. But he couldn't prevent his strength from failing so that the plank fell from his hands and men leapt on him and threw him to the ground and struck him and held his arms and legs.

His body reared up. Half-a-dozen men lay on him. Smashed fragments of bunker furniture lay around. The voice of Sergeant-Major Pöhls became audible: " . . . lot of lunatics, gone right off your heads! Didn't you hear? Alarm! The Russians are attacking! " The Company Commander, Captain von Hollwitz, was there too: " Are you crazy, have you been bitten by a mad dog? Alarm! Out with you! "

" The Russians. . . ."

It was 10.00 hours. Those lying on Urbas had not only the twitching Urbas under them, the earth was suddenly trembling too. Russian artillery was audible, first a heavy salvo, a loud echo, a second reverberating echo. The sprawling soldiers could already hear the next salvo and the following echo and another reverberation with the detonation of the exploding shells. The mills begin to grind.

And Altenhuden and Fell and Gnotke and Gimpf and Liebsch, the bruised and bleeding men in the bunker, Riess still blinded by the deluge of ashes, the limping Tünnes, the apathetic animal Johannes Liebsch—all fingered collar-buttons, donned steel helmets over their rag-bandaged heads, crowded up the bunker steps, leapt into the communication trench and hurried forward to their firing positions. Even Sergeant Maulhard of the wounded buttocks dragged himself along; he could lie behind a machine-gun just as well as on his bunk.

The western sky was in flames. Ravines, the steppe with its hamlets down to the Karpovka valley, the whole snow-covered land seemed aglow. Smoke rose as from a gigantic fire. But one had to be at the regimental command-post to see the flashes from the barrels of Russian artillery. One needed the combined reports of many regiments and of a whole row of divisions and to stand before the General Staff map at Army Headquarters to grasp the fearful fact that over the western half of the ring or—bearing in mind the heart-shape—over one-half of the heart an iron fist was closing.

HILL 126 WAS LOST !

"*Jawohl*, Herr Oberst!"

"*Jawohl*, Herr General!"

"Priority!"

"Priority!"

"The Chief or the C.-in-C. personally!"

Hill 126. . . .

It was one of the commanding heights of the Stalingrad west front. Its loss meant for the enemy an open way as far as the Rossoshka valley; it meant an attack from the rear to the troops lying in the so-called "nose" of Marinovka; it meant a serious threat, mainly to the 3rd (Motorised) Infantry Division. But it was not only Hill 126: alarming reports were coming in from the south of the ring too. The villages of Tsybenko and Kravtsov had fallen. Hill 126, the Kazatchi hills, the thrust directed at Karpovka; in the south Zybenko, Kravzov, Hill 129, the thrust alike directed at Karpovka!

The 1a (the first General Staff Officer) of the Army stood before the Chief of the General Staff. The Chief regarded him with pale, staring eyes. Both knew that the relief expedition had failed, that Hooth had been defeated near Kotelnikovo and was falling back with the remainder of his tanks in the direction of Rostov, that the troops of Manstein's army group were also retreating towards Rostov. The army was beaten, the Stalingrad army was lost; its material was lost; its only remaining task was to preserve its living components.

The account to date was: 330,000 minus 140,000 men. Remainder, 190,000 men.

What was going on now was the beginning of the end. The Chief was pale, his eyes glittered with scarcely controlled rage. A lot of good-for-nothings! That was the conclusion to which a number of strategical and tactical reckonings led him. The 44th Infantry Division not holding! The 376th Infantry Division had been dragging the catastrophe along behind them ever since Kletskaya and were a questionable lot altogether! The 3rd (Motorised) Infantry Division had sat so long in that blasted

front salient and clung on to those bunkers till it was too late and they found themselves in the soup!

"The 3rd (Motorised) must come out of the sack, of course. Rapid retreat, there's nothing else for it in this situation. The liquidation of the 'nose' will free the 29th—we'll send them to Damme. For the rest: Hold! Clean up the penetrations by the 44th and 376th and hold!"

"And in the south?"

"Retake 129 and hold!"

The Chief of General Staff of the Army had a rear defence-line pencilled on his maps with the code word "Violet," and another farther to the rear with the code word "Sunflower." But apart from the order to the 3rd (Motorised) Infantry Division—already attacked from the rear and now in disorderly flight—he issued no orders to retreat. The changes taking place on the fronts must be carried out in blood and disintegration on the spot. What was happening concerned neither an army nor any attainable objective of an army; it concerned only the fate of 190,000 men. And the orders and counter-orders leaving Army H.Q. in all directions—to Bolshaya Rossoshka, Baburkin, Novo Alexeyevka, Karpovka, Voroponovo, Pestchanka—meant not life but death to these men.

The divisional commanders sat in their bunkers, bent over their map-tables, over the radio messages, telephone messages, dispatches that their Ia's laid before them. One held his head between his fists, another's arms lay limp on the table, a third bared his teeth . . . all cursed, all functioned, sat with their Ia's, issued orders, radioed orders, telegraphed, sent orders forward by ordnance officers, dispatch riders, drivers, tanks, runners. One was General Geest, sitting in a balka—as the deep defiles here were called—near Bolshaya Rossoshka. His staff quarters were far from the front and farther than all the others from the threatened positions. Should it come to a withdrawal, a retreat, or even to flight, he would again find himself at the pivotal point. He had therefore received orders to take out of his division an infantry and anti-tank detachment and throw it into the threatened position. As the company he had set up under Captain von Hollwitz was still fighting outside the frame of his division, he again had the rear services, main dressing-stations and casualty clearing stations combed out and set up a second emergency

company under a Lieutenant Wedderkop, which he put on the march in the direction of Baburkin.

Another was a commander at the northern bolt position. He, too, had to send reinforcements to the western front; he sent Colonel Lundt; and one of the two battalions Colonel Lundt took with him was still in temporary charge of the battalion adjutant, Lieutenant Lawkow.

A third was General Gönnern. He was in the large steppe village of Karpovka, where there was a commotion of trunks being packed and cases nailed up and carried out into the street by soldiers and loaded on lorries. Reports of front penetrations in the north and also in the south left no doubt that both thrusts were directed at Karpovka; it was therefore time to move staff quarters farther back.

A fourth was General Damme at Novo Alexeyevka. His 1a, charcoal pencil in his right hand, sat bent over a map. Holding the telephone receiver in his left hand, he was making marks on the map. Damme paced up and down the narrow bunker. Now and then he stopped and looked over his 1a's shoulder at the new markings. He drew on his cigar, found it had gone out, relit it and recommenced his pacing.

His adjutant entered with a face splashed with mud. He was accompanied by another muddy figure: Colonel Vilshofen.

"Well, thank God you're here!" exclaimed Damme as he shook both hands of Vilshofen. "A panzer man—tanks, that's what we need here."

"I have no more tanks, Herr General."

"What? . . . No—no, of course not."

"Four tanks—that's all I've got left."

Vilshofen had to disappoint Damme still further. With his collected troops he had not been sent to Damme's aid, but to occupy the intermediate position between Damme's division and the next.

Damme stepped up to the map and groaned: "What am I to do? I was promised help by Corps. An hour ago a Lieutenant Wedderkop with 200 men went through. You should have seen them—hospital combings, not soldiers! A troop of cripples, every man with ten cartridges in his pouch. What sort of help's that?"

Damme and his 1a and Colonel Vilshofen sat down at the map-table. The adjutant took over the telephone receiver, through which was pouring a stream of new

reports from the front. Damme explained the situation to Vilshofen: "The Kazatchi Hills fought over for weeks. As it only meant losses both sides finally left them unoccupied. But now we've lost Hill 126 too, and we must retreat, there's nothing else for it."

The charcoal in Damme's hand was not drawing a continuous line: it marked a number of points on the map spread out before them. Vilshofen's violet-blue eyes followed the proposed line. The charcoal touched a few other points: these marked five Scythian graves and three hills in front of them.

"You'd have to take over the graves and that most northerly hill too, Vilshofen."

"O.K. I'll have the hill occupied to-night."

"The hill must be held, at least till the new positions are taken up. The 3rd (Motorised) is coming back out of the 'nose.' Then the new line'll run along the road, cross it to the south, and continue to the railway—direction Atamansk, I expect."

Vilshofen stood up. "The Hill, Vilshofen!" Damme repeated as the Colonel left.

Damme and his 1a occupied themselves with another matter: the evacuation to the rear of the supply depot, a repair shop and a few dressing-stations. The 1a again took over the telephone with the incoming reports from the front. Over the second telephone the neighbouring division informed Damme of a deepening of the enemy penetration.

Meanwhile Vilshofen mounted the bunker steps, seated himself in a side-car, and sped over the icy road into the night.

The bunker that Vilshofen had taken on the road to Dmitrevka was no dugout. Surrounded by a collective farm with mud walls, and roofed with mud, it had formerly been a storing-place for potatoes and water-melons by the roadside. Eight steps led down into it; and the grinding of tank tracks, the creaking of cart-wheels, the sound of marching detachments, of service units going to the rear, of reinforcements going forward, could be heard from below. When the heavy door opened and let in a cloud of mist from which emerged the figure of a major, a captain or some front-line officer, a penetrating odour of sweat, blood and unwashed bodies was there.

"Well, gentlemen. . . ."

Colonel Vilshofen and the three men stood up. Vilshofen had been sitting on a vegetable barrel; the other three—a captain, a lieutenant and a sergeant-major—on a fodder-trough in front of him. Colonel Vilshofen shook hands in farewell.

"God be with you!"

Involuntarily this phrase, addressed to all three, had suddenly come to Vilshofen's lips. The three men seemed to regard it as appropriate to the hour; no face betrayed astonishment. They slid their hoods on, turned up their collars, drew on their gauntlets and vanished in the white mist that blew in as the door was opened.

But Vilshofen stood there in amazement.

"*Gott!* . . ." What was this? Why not "Heil Hitler"? And no one missed it!

Captain Steiger, too, was thinking of this phrase that from the regimental commander seemed quite different and far more significant than from the lips of, say, the chaplain. Captain Steiger was leading a column of forty men, each four hauling a light anti-tank gun. The sky clouded over, leaving a gap of bright stars, a gap that reached down to the earth, to the huts of Dmitrevka jutting on the landscape like a row of rocks slowly sinking behind the trekking column. Very slowly the column went forward, wheels turning spoke by spoke, and afterwards still more slowly, moving only in jerks. The ground, churned up by tanks in the rainy season, here and there torn by bombs, and now frozen, on which the anti-tanks with their four-in-hand of men dipped and rose again, dipped and rose again, lay spread out like a sea petrified in the midst of a storm. Infantrymen on the way—it was on the line that they were to take and hold firmly—were working like the damned. With spade, pickaxe and chopper they were hacking themselves into the ground. The clay soil was frozen hard as granite.

An icy wind rose from the gap in the rear and swept over the field. But the men were steaming wet under their clothes, sweating with exertion and weakness. A lance-corporal, sent by Steiger to fetch help from the nearest company, came back alone. The company itself needed help; the soil was as hard as iron and the men couldn't get into it. By daylight they would be standing under the open sky—not a tree, not a hillock, no cover at all!

Steiger's column laboured on, the men groaning and

cursing the infantrymen who had refused help. And those infantrymen, a few kilometres behind them, striking at the frozen ground with axes till the sparks flew and blood broke through their palms and pores, groaned and cursed the battalion commander and the regimental commander. "He ought to come up here and have a go at this!" The battalion commander groaned at the number of shortages reported to him, and cursed and rushed dispatch-riders off to the regiment. The regimental commander groaned at the sheer insuperable difficulties, and sent one ordnance officer after another to inform the Division of the impossibility of the planned line and to recommend a further withdrawal—taking advantage of suitable geographical features—as far as, say, the Rossoshka valley.

The divisional commander, General Damme, convinced of the impossibility of holding the line, had the telephone in his hand; but after Corps had refused him further flak and anti-tank help he no longer said: "But listen . . . allow me to say . . . but this is the limit, gentlemen. . . ." He pleaded, he shouted, he howled, he raved and swore like a droschke-cabby and finally slammed the receiver down on the telephone-box so hard that it hummed.

At that hour there was a face in the Stalingrad ring, a face of which one half was rigid and the other half twitching; and the mouth spoke twitching words. The words were stenographed, put into code, sent into the ether—a wait—an answer came and was decoded; and the face remained as it was, one half rigid, the other half twitching.

The answer was: "The western line, west of the Rossoshka valley, and the southern, south of the Karpovka valley, must be held in all circumstances, cost what it may. Moreover, an explanation is required of how it was possible for the army in the south to give up Tsybenko and Kravtsov without having obtained the necessary approval from the O.K.W."*

There were generals whose faces turned blue with rage. There were general staff officers, receiving and passing on orders, whose faces were rigid masks. There were fits of insane rage, hoarse screaming voices, speechless silence; there were morphia injections and veronal, there was death-like enervation. And there was obedience—accursed, criminal, killing obedience.

* Oberkommando der Wehrmacht.

There was something else, too, in the Stalingrad ring. The regimental commander Vilshofen left his battle position. Forward, his regiment was dying. He might have died there—but perhaps he could save what little there was to save. He drove through the night in a tank, arrived at the front and stepped out. Icy mist, and under the mist a snowfield. Dark dots on the field—men with pick and shovel, rifles beside them, a long line. Up to the waist, no deeper, they had hacked themselves into the ground.

The commander stepped up to one of the groups.

"How long have you been digging?"

"All night, Herr Oberst."

"Had breakfast?"

"No, Herr Oberst—only hot water—can't call that a breakfast."

"No, you can't."

They had nothing to smoke either. The Colonel shared out the cigarettes that he had with him. He regarded the faces as one after another they bent over the burning match in the hollow of his hand. He knew them all. His troop was so reduced that he knew the names not only of those who had belonged to his former panzer regiment, but of the new ones as well. One was Wilhelm Vogt, of his panzer regiment, a peasant from the Weser district near Minden, whose old man at home was growing weak and could hardly manage the work. Some time ago, when it might still have been possible, Vilshofen had had to refuse him home leave. Another was de Wede, also a peasant, from the heath near Celle; his wife was carrying on the farm with Russian and Polish prisoners. A third was the young clerk from Krefeld; a fourth was Wilsdruff, who had been in charge of the dispersed repair squad—he was a metal worker from Upper Silesia, and father of five children. Vogt, de Wede, the young clerk, Wilsdruff—all looked alike; above the stubble on their chins were the same hollow faces, the same fixed, staring eyes.

Vilshofen lit a cigarette too, and smoked it while he talked to the soldiers. But he gave them no hope, nor told them anything he no longer believed himself. When the peasant de Wede asked "Will Hooth still get here, Herr Oberst?" he answered: "It doesn't look like it; and we're standing here quite alone."

"So our young husband won't get to his wife for a long

time, and he hasn't even seen her yet!" This referred to the clerk from Krefeld, who some time back had got married by proxy and on that occasion had also been refused leave. Vilshofen looked at him and said: "His luck is no worse than that of the men who've known their wives a long time and still want to see them again."

Vilshofen turned to de Wede and Wilsdruff. "Hand on your heart, de Wede, what would you do if you could have your way now?"

"Lie down here and not go a step farther, Herr Oberst."

"And you, Wilsdruff?"

"May I say what I think, Herr Oberst?"

"Yes, you may, Wilsdruff."

"Run over there and maybe save my life, Herr Oberst," said Wilsdruff pointing to the west into the unknown.

"So that's what you'd do! And the Russians?"

"I think they're human beings too."

Vilshofen thoughtfully regarded the soldier's face. He had last seen it that night by Kletskaya; and much had happened since then. "If you think that's a way, Wilsdruff, I shan't stop you or even have you stopped. But in my opinion, if what you suggest is to be done it must be done by all together in a full realisation of the situation."

It was still before daybreak. Vilshofen went on and stepped down into a hollow that led to a ravine. He stood in the ravine, towering a head taller than any in the group of men there.

One of these men was Captain Tomas, another was Vilshofen's adjutant, Lieutenant Latte. Two other captains were there, Runz and Hedemann, the two battalion leaders. The rest were the crews of four tanks. Vilshofen had summoned the latter to this conference so that they too should hear what it was about, what they were to go into action for, what they were perhaps to die for.

"The enemy has succeeded in making deep penetrations, here on the west front and also on the south front," he said. "The 'nose' of Marinovka is at present being evacuated, but that's not much loss. This 'nose,' with its long front salient, was a waste of strength anyway, and the fellows there ought to have come out long ago. But they stuck there because they had good bunkers and nothing behind them. Well, that's one side of the picture. Now they've got to come out, and our holding on here

will contribute towards making their withdrawal possible. Of course that's only one factor in the frame-work of our general assignment."

Vilshofen raised his hand and pointed out into the mist.

"On that hill there lies Captain Steiger. On each of the hillocks right and left is a group of anti-tank. The hill dominates the road to Novo Alexeyevka. Your job, my men, is to support the men on the hill there, to beat off the expected attack on the hill, and if possible route the attackers."

"And now, my men——" He almost brought out another "God be . . .", but stopped himself, cast his eyes over the little group, and said briefly: "Well, go to it."

He shook hands with Tomas of the scarred face, and with Latte, whose features were still youthful. This gesture he could not suppress. He remained standing on the spot and watched Tomas, who since being wounded dragged one leg a little, and Latte and the men getting into the tanks. He saw the spy-holes close and watched as the tanks rolled down the ravine, climbed up the opposite slope on to the level ground and like four bright blue beetles turned round by the Scythian graves and vanished. Four tanks! Not so long ago it had been a roaring stream of iron and petrol fumes that darkened the sky. Not so long ago he had led a panzer regiment.

"Now, gentlemen, I'm ready."

This to his battalion leaders, Captain Runz and Captain Hedemann. They guided him to the bunker they had had dug during the night. It was a hole three feet deep hacked in the ground, above it a tent powdered with snow and earth. When they had climbed in and sat down, the tent-sides, folded back, gave a view of one of the Scythian graves standing on the plain.

It was not yet daylight; darkness still reigned in the ravines and fog hovered over the frozen ground. Beyond the Scythian grave a star dipped into the mist and began to twinkle.

Ammunition, food, pioneer material—these were the questions discussed here in the tent. No flak or anti-tank: for the few remaining guns only a few shots each. Instead of 200 grammes of bread daily, a ration of only 100 grammes. For building positions not one nail left and not an inch of wire. Gaps in the companies, and daily smaller and smaller groups to fill the gaps. Vilshofen knew all

this, and he knew that it was the same with the neighbouring regiment. The division was burnt out, and so was the division on the right. Damme's division, on the left, was called by the soldiers "the lost division" or, if they remembered an earlier costly river crossing, "the drowned division" or "the accursed division." It had already been routed and collected together again and brought up to strength with men from rear services and the remnants of other divisions, and it was of such poor quality as to crumble at the slightest contact with the enemy. Only the tank forces behind it gave it backbone and held it together.

"Where's it all going to lead to?"

"Are we abandoned then?"

"The line can't be held."

"But the Führer will do all in his power. We must break through!"

Thus the battalion leaders Runz and Hedemann.

Vilshofen said: "Break through—that was suggested when it was perhaps still possible. The suggestion was turned down, and now it's too late. It's no use for the starving and poorly armed troops that we've still got."

"*Mein Gott*, the Führer's word!"

"Have we been abandoned? What have we done to deserve this?"

It was cold, and snowflakes were blowing in. The hole was so narrow that knees touched. The breath of the speaker drifted into the face of his vis-à-vis like steam. The howling of falling shells was audible; and the Scythian mound beyond the fluttering canvas was surrounded by a flickering green light.

Vilshofen looked at his two commanders. Runz was a forty-year-old state employee. A few days before he had celebrated in the hole the eleventh anniversary of his wedding; before the encirclement he had received a daily letter, or two or three at every mail distribution, from his wife. Hedemann was also an official and reserve officer. He had acquired a little property in Latvia at a bargain price, and wanted nothing more than for the war to end so that he could sit in peace on the Druya and fish and hunt and cultivate his marsh vegetation—a theme he delighted to expound and which he discussed as eagerly as his experiences in the French campaign. Such were Runz and Hedemann; that was all Vilshofen knew about them. That morning they looked unkempt, unwashed and

bristly, not much different from the men forward in the weapon pits. Their eyes stared just as dully into this day of driving snow and rumbling metal.

"To sum up," said Vilshofen, "ammunition must be used sparingly and food will become scarcer. We have no more horses to slaughter. We can't reckon with help from outside. That is the bitter situation, and we've got to see it through with our own resources."

Runz blew out a cloud of thick white vapour. Hedemann looked at the gauntlets on his hands. The howling outside grew louder, the shells were falling nearer.

The day had come, and the attack was upon them. The hill was under fire, and smoke from the top of it rose like a banner into the grey sky. This was the moment, the moment of the dam-burst, of the landslide, of the catastrophe on the Stalingrad western front. It was the precise moment at which it touched Vilshofen's combat group. Vilshofen heard a commotion outside the tent—footsteps, voices, a dry voice reporting. He heard the words: "The whole division's gone to pot!"

Vilshofen flicked back the canvas and climbed out of the hole. He saw a few officers, and in the middle a strange lieutenant, and N.C.O.s and men standing around. The lieutenant was explaining something and making gestures that with his long arms looked rather odd.

"What's gone to what, Oberleutnant?" asked Vilshofen.

"The division, Herr Oberst—the division's smashed up—in full flight. The left flank of Herr Oberst is completely uncovered."

"What division are you speaking of? Who are you, anyway?"

"Oberleutnant Wedderkop, Herr Oberst."

The lieutenant had been in charge of an alarm company, and his company had been blown to the four winds. Something had in fact "gone to pot," to a bloody and insensible mess. Wedderkop was only the first to arrive breathless in Vilshofen's lines. Now others came—panting mobs rushing along. "Hurra!" roaring Russians in white snow-mantles followed on their heels.

"Everybody here!—Runz, the machine-gun—Hedemann, the anti-tank!—Wedderkop, hand-grenades!" The Colonel lay behind a machine-gun, Runz behind another, Hedemann behind an anti-tank. Wedderkop showed that he knew how to use grenades.

Vilshofen managed to stop a number of soldiers. They defended themselves against charging infantry. One wave they drove off, then worked forward and awaited the next under cover of the Scythian mound.

Vilshofen, his face black with powder, called Wedderkop over. " Now give me a coherent report, Wedderkop! '

This was the picture that emerged from Wedderkop's description and from earlier information, reports and observation of the enemy. A penetration from the north. Damme's division, in spite of the arrival of the 29th (Motorised) Infantry Division had not held; and both divisions had been routed. Now parts of these divisions were falling on Vilshofen's own regiment like burning splinters, and his own men were like cattle running before a prairie fire.

Vilshofen was left with a group that had remained. He certainly could not stay by the Scythian grave. Before withdrawing he wanted to collect round him the hill-groups and the four tanks. He contacted Lundt and Bauer by telephone, but got no answer from Captain Steiger. He looked across. There was nothing to be seen but the smoke that enveloped the hill.

. . . . .

Captain Steiger lay on the top of the hill. He, too, from a higher level, had seen the day dawning over the frozen land. He had been thinking of the days he had behind him, of the previous night, and of the Colonel's parting words.

God . . . if not for Hitler's sake, then for God's sake! Yesterday Hill 126 and the falling back over the eastern slopes; last night the infantry with pickaxe and spade, and his forty grenadiers harnessed to the anti-tank guns like weary oxen—half the guns abandoned on the way, the men incapable of dragging them farther; the other half, except for two, set up in front of the hill. Twenty men, and again twenty men, hauled those two up and put them in position at the top.

Two anti-tank and thirty-two rifles—and the hill must be held! The men lying in snow hollows like hares under the open sky, and sleeping like hares with open, staring eyes.

A star sank and the sky was grey. The last star. By the lost Hill 126, where the road leads down and on to Karpovka, it had risen, soon to sink again. Darkness still hovered above the frozen land between that height and the

occupied hill. To the left, where Lieutenant Lundt and thirty men flanked the hill, was a hillock; to the right, where lay Sergeant-Major Bauer with his twelve men, was undulating land.

Hill 126. Yesterday and the day before Steiger, with Lieutenant Lundt and Sergeant-Major Bauer, had come down from there. Trucks, tanks, guns rammed into and on top of one another, dead horses, frozen corpses. On the territory sloping to the east, a road crammed with carts, ambulances, fleeing columns, a wedge of tanks forcing the mass up the slopes right and left. The road thus totally blocked, bombed, the panic-stricken troops suddenly petrified as it was gripped by the hard-pressing Russian artillery. Metal, human bones, horses' heads; stiffening legs wrapped in muddy rags; caterpillar tracks, chunks of clay, a crushed staff car; a scalped head, the brains frozen on to a silver badge; open mouths, clay, snow, hair—such, yesterday and the day before, had been the withdrawal of the 3rd (Motorised) Infantry Division from the Marinovka area.

To-day the infantry behind, digging for their lives and the hard earth foiling their exertions; the forty men, the anti-tanks abandoned, panting up the hill and now, rifle in hand, staring into the west. . . .

" To the west, God's will. . . . *Is* that God's will? "

Captain Steiger could not get away from his thoughts. Not for nothing his roots in the soil. He was a master craftsman from Bopfingen, and his grandfather and father still farmed on the Härdtfeld land. It was a soil ploughed through the centuries by the Protestant Waldenses, by Swedes, Bohemians, Swiss, by Reformers from north and south; a soil on which " by God's will " human beings had been burned, beheaded, tortured, flogged, boiled and roasted. And he, travelling a road that leaned far more to the side of death than of life, had been through enough and suffered enough to lay bare and bring to the surface long-hidden layers of philosophy.

" Yes, ever since the world began the burners have been more learned than the burned. . . ." An odd proverb; and the man to whom it occurred could not have told whence it came. The words came into his head at the top of a hill to the west of Novo Alexeyevka. But to prompt the thought his brain had to receive the impetus of a deafening roar, the neighbouring hill with Lieutenant Lindt

had to go up in smoke, and from Sergeant-Major Bauer's side a machine-gun had to rattle its last desperate rounds.

Steiger's ears caught a long-drawn-out "Urra-a-a-a-a!" Figures in short fur coats, heads in bearskin caps, were rising through a smoke-cloud from a gulley. There was fine light-blue smoke from rifle barrels and the smoke-balls of falling hand-grenades. An anti-tank gun—Amberger, Schuster and Nitschke—was firing at a roaring target lumbering up. It dipped into the gully, rose again. A heavy Russian tank—and it was nothing but a steer that took Schuster and Nitschke, with the anti-tank to which they clung, on its horns and tossed them over its back.

Steiger felt a heavy blow and collapsed. This was the moment when the proverb came into his head, the proverb that continues scornfully: "You can see it in any kitchen—the cook is cleverer than the wood he burns." Steiger's heart was not with the burners but with the burned. "Who are now the burners, and who are the burned? This is happening west of Novo Alexeyevka on foreign soil a hundred times set on fire!" With the burners, the cooks, the learned, the scorners, he had come here. Who was the cook? Who was the wood? Was man only wood after all?

Steiger could not answer these questions. He lost consciousness.

. . . . .

The Russian capitulation terms had been refused. The consequence was the liquidation of the ring. The first blows opened the front to the north, in the area of Dmitrevka, and at the same time in the south, in the area of Kravtsov and Tsybenko. The thrust continued in the north as far as the big steppe village of Karpovka on the Kalatch-Stalingrad railway line; in the south it was also aimed at Karpovka. The troops—mainly the 3rd (Motorised) Infantry Division—fleeing out of the 'nose' left part of their men and materials behind in a raging blizzard. East of Karpovka, by Novo Rogatchik, they again came under fire, this time from the southern thrust of the Red Army. The 376th Infantry Division, already badly mauled at Kletskaya on the other side of the Don, at this point ceased to exist. The 29th (Motorised) Infantry Division, sent in at the last hour to relieve them, was caught up in the collapse, and only remnants of both divisions fell back towards the east. Farther north the

344th and 76th Infantry Divisions were also forced back to the east. This time it was the 113th Infantry Division, up to now a part of the northern bolt position, that was the stationary pivot round which the turn was to be made. But this "turn" was a flight through blinding snow, a falling back from a battlefield on which the material of whole divisions was thrown away and on which after three days of continuous fighting 30,000 dead were left behind. The new defence line towards which the High Command was striving—not in a planned and orderly retreat but in blood and disintegration—was nothing but a line on paper, and on general staff maps a stroke running across the ring from north to south. It bore the code name "Violet."

The remnants of the divisions defeated on the west front were trying to reach this non-existent line. The 113th Infantry Division in the north had only to turn and face towards the west. The 76th Infantry Division had a short distance to march. The 44th Infantry Division had to cover a longer distance through snow and death. The remnants of the 29th (Motorised) Infantry Division, the 3rd (Motorised) Infantry Division, and the mob of the—on paper—still deploying 376th Infantry Division had too far to go, and only a few wretched groups reached the snowfields that on the staff maps represented sectors of defence line "Violet."

Five German divisions were fleeing towards the east, marching, in order, in disorder, with or without food, disintegrating, falling apart, joining up again. Dmitrevka was overrun. Karpovka, Novo Alexeyevka, Baburkin and the bunker villages by the Rossoshka rivulet were evacuated in panic by the staffs.

Opened trunks, rolled blankets, tunics, trousers, scattered documents. Animals hurriedly slaughtered, live pigs loaded on lorries, cows driven eastward, high-piled lorries, trucks, command-buses, swerving out into the roads. Telephone calls, shouts for petrol, for ration depots, clothing depots, casualty clearing stations, for the staffs.

Blizzard. 28 degrees below zero.

The staffs on foot followed the routed troops from the front. Whether they came through Karpovka, through Novo Alexeyevka or through Baburkin, the scene was the same. Toppled guns, abandoned tanks, lorries standing broadside on the roads, piles of cartridges, bombs, grenades. When they entered the bunkers they found doors open,

wooden cases broken open, half-packed, abandoned portmanteaux, soap, preserves, tallow candles, chocolate, cakes, bread, and on the floors service regulations and army note-books. The mud-spattered front-line men, eyes popping, had stuffed mouths and pockets, heard the guns of the pursuers, stumbled up the steps and run out again on to the snow-covered steppe. They followed the furrows made by wheels, caterpíllar tracks, columns of lorries, along the road taken by the staffs, direction Pitomnik-Gumrak-Gorodischtche-Stalingrad. That was the direction taken by the defeated army.

Here and there—even on the way to defence line "Violet"—order triumphed. At one point a little pock-marked lieutenant collected his fleeing men round him, lay with them behind a wall of snow, fed them with food taken from an abandoned ration lorry, and sent runners in search of his regiment till he found the commander and his staff and again received orders. A flak commander, after losing half his guns in the collapse of the west front, collected flak guns abandoned on the roads and in the villages, had them transported by his men, and thus again make up his complement of guns. There were many such Lieutenant Lawkows and Major Buchners; but there were many others who lost their heads and ran till they were stopped or till they reached Stalingrad. Wherever mobs got together again, in every case the organising factor, besides the resolute leader, was the field-kitchen. Where company or group had fallen in step again, communication with battalion or regiment was re-established. Regiments sought and found their ration-depots on the Pitomnik airfield, crammed together with the staffs in the ravines and balkas between Pitomnik and Stalingrad and between Voroponovo and Stalingrad.

Colonel Vilshofen had been caught up in the events in the front line. To Runz, Hedemann, Wedderkop and the group of men that he had collected round him at the Scythian grave had been added Sergeant-Major Bauer and Lieutenant Kindt, each with a few men. Of the four tanks one had returned, bringing Tomas, Latte, the wounded Captain Steiger, and two soldiers picked up on the hill.

Thirty hours had passed. There had been flight, a smoking field-kitchen, fighting and inability to disengage; there had been the march from the Scythian grave through Otorvanovka and on across the trackless land. On his

tank Vilshofen had sped ahead and overtaken the fleeing men. The smoke of the field-kitchen which he had set up at the edge of a village was like a banner visible from afar. Here he had collected some of his men round him as they waded through the snow. By now he had one anti-tank, one tank and some hundred rifles, and he could again set up a heavy machine-gun detachment.

Abandoning his baggage cart, Vilshofen took with him the ration and ammunition cart, no longer drawn by horses but by Russian prisoners that he had kept with him since Vertyatchi as a labour squad. Neither with Damme's division on the left nor with the division on the right—Austrians, whose staff had been at Baburkin—had he succeeded in re-establishing communication. Cut off from the other group and with a decimated little crowd behind him—many were missing or killed in flight, some had reached other groups, some had fled—he reached a hamlet of four wooden houses and three clay huts. This was Otorvanovka, the site of a partly evacuated dressing-station.

Up to now his troop had been swept by artillery; so far he had managed to hold off the Russian infantry. But now the infantry was so close on his heels that there was nothing for it but to take up position here. Thus the main fighting line ran through the dressing-station, and it was not long before the huts were shot up and in flames.

Then there was that senior M.O., still a young man, unmilitary and undisciplined, who suddenly stood in front of Vilshofen and expressed what at least one of his battalion leaders, Captain Runz, had wanted to say but had merely hinted at. Briefly, the M.O. demanded the hoisting of the white flag.

"Out of the question, and keep out of things that don't concern you!" was the answer the doctor received. Roofs were collapsing and walls cleaving open. Under the collapsing roofs and falling clods of clay lay sick and wounded men. As the line had to be laid farther back, all who still breathed among the ruins of the dressing-station came under fire from both sides. The doctor came again. This time he made no suggestions—it was too late for that. He put questions and demanded answers, an M.O. to a Colonel—an unheard-of-thing.

That was Otorvanovka, nothing but an isolated bolt position held for a few hours. There was nothing more

to right or left. What happened here was, in fact, the senseless destruction of men, just as the M.O. had described it.

But the M.O. had gone farther. He had applied his observations not only to Otorvanovka but to the whole Stalingrad operation and even to the whole grandiose advance on Stalingrad. Under military law he should have been shot on the spot. Nevertheless, he remained with Vilshofen's group and accompanied them towards the east. He had uttered, while awake, what others—Vilshofen himself, perhaps—thought only in dreams. Should he have been shot for that? It was, admittedly, a thing for which not a few had been shot.

Thirty hours had passed. Vilshofen's combat group made their way through the Rossoshka valley, crossed the frozen Rossoshka rivulet and went on through a deep balka, which after hours of marching led up to the steppe and to a village to the north of Novo Alexeyevka.

It was towards three in the afternoon. Driving snow from a low sky. Even this out-of-the-way hamlet on the steppe was burning. Three huts were on fire and clouds of smoke were rising from others. A barn roof collapsed, and a rain of sparks and burning wisps of straw descended on the column as they marched by.

A hand was raised, that of the peasant de Wede. With bent, muddy fingers he combed down his face and wiped the soot from his eyes. De Wede, the Krefelder and Sergeant Matzke were marching in one file. Two days before they too had thrown their spades away, left their rifles and run. They had found their way to the field-kitchen and the regiment, had lain behind clumps of clay at Otorvanovka; and now they were marching through a steppe hamlet with sparks flying in their faces. On the road stood guns, bombed or undamaged vehicles; dead men lay by the roadside. The men put one foot in front of the other; their eyes were no longer fixed on the back and mess-tin of the man in front, but on his rag-wrapped legs. They no longer saw the legs and shuffling feet of the man in front, nor did they perceive the cloud of dirt and decay that went with them.

A halt was made at the entrance to a hamlet. There was the baggage cart, there were the sledges, there, too, were the Russians who hauled them. The Russians had begun to dig a trench. De Wede, the Krefelder and Matzke

sat on the roadside and awaited the order to dismiss and make their quarters. There were bunkers and the plank walls of the huts, which offered warmth and some protection from shrapnel.

"There'll be something else here too," said Sergeant Matzke.

"Yes, sure to be something else," agreed de Wede.

The Krefelder, Robert Brünner, who had been an insurance agent, said: "Wonder where Krämer's got to?"

Hermann Krämer had been sent ahead to the hamlet to have a look round and search the bunkers. Matzke had sent him off with the words: "If you find anything, come back at once."

Presently Krämer returned. Like Brünner, he had been a clerk, and had worked in a bank at Magdeburg; but this was belied by his appearance in tattered greatcoat and by his unshaven face. With that hollow face and eyes widened by hunger he looked more than his twenty-eight years.

"There's nothing left—everything's eaten up," reported Krämer. "But I found these"—and he pulled something out of his greatcoat pocket.

"Spuds?"

"Yes, spuds!"

They were frozen potatoes; each man got two.

"But they're lovely; they're cooked; I found 'em in a pig trough."

"In a pig trough?"

"Yes, there was a corps staff here, and they kept pigs. Fed 'em on cooked potatoes, too!"

"I haven't been allowed to do that at home on the farm for six years," said de Wede.

A stiff, frozen figure was lifted off one of the sledges and carried past. "Vogt!" said de Wede. "Yes, Vogt," said the Krefelder.

As they moved the hard, frozen potatoes in their mouths their eyes followed the corpse of Private Vogt. Two days before they had hacked out a weapon pit with Vogt. He had been wounded at the Scythian grave and died on the sledge.

Two more frozen corpses were carried by. The last was that of the battalion leader, Captain Hedemann.

"He's got no boots on either!"

"They've pulled them off—that's the order."

Wilsdruff stepped up to the group.

"What are you chewing here?"

"*Pommes frites*," said Brünner.

"Real potatoes?"

"Yes—Hermann found them in a pig trough."

"Where?"

"There's no more there," said Krämer.

Wilsdruff nodded sadly. Presently he asked: "Is that new lieutenant, Wedderkop, going to stay with us?"

Matzke shrugged his shoulders.

Brünner asked: "Where's he to go? His whole company's kaputt. A fellow here says that only the day before he gave one man an extra guard for chopping wood with his bayonet!"

"He looks that sort!"

There was no order to dismiss, and nothing came of the expected night's rest in bunkers or behind the plank walls of the huts. The soldiers saw Captain Tomas and Lieutenant Wedderkop return from a reconnaissance and report to the Colonel, after which the order was given for a rapid departure.

Work on the trench was broken off. The dead—besides Captain Hedemann, nine soldiers had died on the sledges—were laid in a clearing in the snow. The men waited for the Colonel, who was standing by the sledge on which the other battalion leader, Captain Runz, lay dying. It was not long before Runz, too, was brought along and laid with the others.

The eleven corpses—greatcoats, tunics and boots removed—lay in a row. Grey snowflakes fell from the low sky. A shell landed near, and a fountain of smoke, mud and snow rose in the mist. Standing around were Captain Tomas, Lieutenant Wedderkop, Lieutenant Kindt, Lieutenant Latte, Sergeant-Major Bauer, and the doctor and medical orderlies from Otorvanovka. A little farther away, by the heap of sledges, crouched the Russian prisoners.

These were the surroundings in which Colonel Vilshofen found himseif. And this was the hour and place at which he awoke from a wild dream—a dream that had lasted not merely these thirty hours of marching; a dream that had lasted thirty years, from one war to the other, from a Verdun on the Maas to the Verdun on the Volga.

Vilshofen looked around, and there was much that he

saw under the grey sky. Not only those eleven corpses stretched out before him; not only the Russian slave column over there; not only the flash of artillery and the splashing of shells in the village and close by. He saw himself, forty-eight years old, as a mirror reflecting bloody scenes, but bloodless and ordinary happenings too; as a man of many layers, and here and now they were coming to the surface. The new images before his eyes could not, like the earlier ones, be simply registered and then fade and be forgotten; they demanded an explanation. And not only those new images, but many others, too, demanded explanation.

There lay Hedemann, a magistrate from central Germany. But Captain Hedemann was never to enjoy his pension in Latvia, never to sit on the bank of the Druya with a fishing rod in his hand.

There lay Captain Runz, who had been a headmaster. His last thought had been for his wife. Only a few minutes ago he had said: "Please, Herr Oberst, give my love to my wife, and tell her . . ."—and that had been the end. There lay three soldiers. They had fallen for a road that led from nothing to nothing! That cut-off road was no military objective, any more than that cut-off railway line to the south. To hold either of them could be neither a military aim nor a military necessity. Why, then, this sacrifice of human lives?

That was the question!

"We are tying up enemy forces, we are helping the rest of the front; so the purpose of our sacrifices must be sought outside the scene of our own operations." Such an answer might have satisfied, even yesterday; but now it failed to satisfy, for the question came from afar. The hour had come, and the cup of bitterness was full and brimming over.

There stood Latte, believing and ready to be stretched out dead in the next kilometre. There stood Tomas, neither believing nor unbelieving, but loyal and equally ready to go to his death if required. There stood R.S.M. Bauer: he had made up the casualty list of almost the entire regiment and kept it as carefully as he once kept the leave rota. There stood Lieutenant Kindt, an able and devoted officer. There stood Lieutenant Wedderkop, with a Nazi training from the first, who as a child had had the camp signboard over him: "WE ARE BORN TO DIE!"

There stood that young man, the doctor from Otorvanovka, who did not drop his eyes when one looked at him. He had worn an oilcloth apron, with rolled-up sleeves, and his arms to the elbows were red with blood. Thus he had operated till the roof over his head had fallen on him and on the soldier lying on the table in front of him. Only the sight of such devotion to duty had made Vilshofen overlook his searching questions and observations and forget about the penalty demanded by military law. And, after all, had not this doctor raised the very question that he, Vilshofen, was now facing?

What was the answer? What *was* the answer?

Lieutenant Wedderkop shifted from one foot to the other. R.S.M. Bauer dully regarded the bare feet of his former battalion leader, Runz. Latte's eyes remained fixed on the face of his colonel.

The colonel stood like a frozen sentry. "For Führer and Reich"—some such words should have come now, but they did not come. The colonel could not utter them.

He looked across the row of corpses, over the rows of soldiers and stretcher-bearers, over the pile of sledges, far beyond the hollow whence came the Russian firing; farther still into the icy mist, to Otorvanovka, where bandaged spectres staggered up, tried to make steps they could no longer make, and fell down as they had fallen thirty hours earlier, to lie under burning beams. And Vilshofen's eyes looked still farther, and his gaze came back from afar.

He said nothing but: "Amen!"

Snow was shovelled over the faces and figures of the dead. Vilshofen called the officers round him and gave orders for the onward march. The last tank was blown up, but first emptied of petrol and the petrol used to make mobile two lorries standing in the village. On one of these Captain Tomas, whose leg-wound made him unfit for marching or going into action with the infantry, was to go to Stalingrad and report at Army H.Q. for other duties, taking with him the M.O., medical orderlies and walking wounded brought out of Otorvanovka. On the other lorry Lieutenant Wedderkop was to take the wounded either to Pitomnik airfield or, if they could not be left there, to Gumrak hospital. Moreover, Lieutenant Wedderkop was to find divisional staff, report the position and condition of the regiment, and bring back rations, petrol and

ammunition. Lieutenant Kindt was ordered to set off with the cart at once. Next destination: twelve kilometres on and east of the road to Pitomnik. R.S.M. Bauer was to be rearguard and, having picked up anti-tank guns and ammunition in the hamlet, was to take up position on the eastern edge of the hamlet and beat off the expected infantry attacks—and possibly tanks too—thus covering the retreat.

The colonel himself led the main body of the group. The temperature had suddenly fallen. As they marched off the thermometer showed −26° C. The receding hamlet was under heavy fire; a bank of yellow smoke lay over the huts. It was growing dark; snow lay on both sides of the road and in front.

. . . . .

That same night Lieutenant Wedderkop was driving along the road to Pitomnik. He was twenty-two years old, a tall, lanky, blond youth. If ordered to do so he would stick a cigarette between his teeth and with fixed bayonet charge a well-dug-in regiment, or he would charge a 52-ton tank and die like a sheepdog trained to attack tanks. He had been taught that, not in the army but in a special S.S. camp for picked youths from the Hitlerjugend. The feeling of strength, physical and moral—" moral " in the sense of the superiority of a supposed " Herrenvolk " to an inferior race of slaves and sub-humans—had been developed in him; and based on it was a kind of reckless courage not aimed at self-preservation, often indeed aimed at self-destruction. But it is a long way from that sort of artificial self-confidence and mechanical bravery to the noble quality of human valour, and for this latter certain attributes were lacking; and in so far as they were present—as they are in every human being—they had been systematically stunted. S.S. Junker Wedderkop had stepped into life as a mere outlined figure, a half-finished, artificial product. Life could kill him; for that he had been educated. Or life could remould him from the start; but for that neither time, effort nor means had been applied in the cultivation of his type. In a world in which the balance is properly distributed there are not on the one side masters and super-humans to whom the world belongs, and on the other side slaves, sub-humans and poltroons to whom nothing belongs. But in such a world, balanced with good and bad, efficient and inefficient, with

courage and weakness in every human soul, he could not, with his upbringing, assert himself.

Shrapnel from a tank had torn one-half of Captain Steiger's face. His right arm was smashed, but his legs were all right when Tomas brought him down from the hill. But after the sledge journey there had been something wrong with his feet, or with one of his feet. Wedderkop and the driver had had to lift him into the lorry. And with this foot it had all begun.

The road on which Wedderkop found himself was a difficult one to drive on, even without the snow. Though on the whole in flat country, it dipped into undulations and descended sometimes into ravines, sometimes into a dried-up river-bed, to climb up again on the other bank. Far from being the shortest way between steppe villages it wound on, adapting itself to the territory, in curves and broad loops almost as, ages ago, the cows of the steppe had trodden them. That night fine powdery snow lay on the road, here and there in drifts as high as walls. The route was marked by bundles of straw fastened to stakes. The forty or forty-five kilometres that Wedderkop had before him was in itself no great distance. But that night battalions had taken twelve hours to cover ten kilometres, and some had never reached their destination. During those hours many who were on the road between Karpovka and Pitomnik or between Baburkin and Pitomnik, or even between the Rossoshka ravine and Pitomnik no longer reckoned in kilometres; for them it was a matter of a few more metres to the running-board of a signalled vehicle.

Wedderkop leaned back, greatcoat collar turned up, fur cap pressed down on his forehead, and blinked through the windscreen into the broad white landscape. A waste of white, dry powder, and an extravagant filigree-work of wind-swept undulations. When the driver reached for the gear-lever and engaged second and first gear, at the same time switching on the headlights for a better view, and the engine raced while gears and wheels revolved ineffectually before the wheels gripped again and ploughed through a spattering wall of mud and snow—it was then that the reality of this cruel night in the light of the headlamps permeated the driver's cabin.

They saw a big lorry on the way, bonnet and front wheels in the ditch, rear wheels on the road. A figure

stood in the middle of the road, two others crouched by the lorry. The driver stopped and got out. The man on the road had yelled himself hoarse and had no voice left: he had held out his arm in its blood-stained bandage like a signal-flag. The two on the ground could still croak, but were unable to move their legs. The driver, with Wedderkop's help, dragged the three to the lorry and laid them with the other wounded. They threw a glance under the tarpaulin of the wrecked lorry. The bodies of twenty or thirty seriously wounded men lay there on the sloping floor; they had slid to the front end and frozen to a mound of corpses, blood-stained clothes and bandages.

Farther on there was a second lorry at the roadside, a third, a fourth. . . . A convoy of lorries with wounded had driven over the road the same day, and some had been wrecked on the way. The driver stopped once more, but not again.

A fifth, a sixth, a seventh wrecked lorry. Figures rising in the snow—drivers, medical orderlies, groups of wounded who had left the lorries and their frozen loads, were trying to find their way on foot. In the light of the headlamps they staggered up, waved, gesticulated, raised clenched fists, jumped back at the last moment as the lorry rushed by, and sank into the night.

Captain Steiger's foot—or was it the boot and the rags wrapped round it thawing in the warmth of the engine?—was the cause of all that followed. Captain Steiger, tortured by pains that rose up to the knee and above it, begged Wedderkop to let him stretch out his leg. In the narrow space of the driver's cabin there was nothing else for it but to take Steiger's leg on his lap. After a while Steiger implored him to take off rags and boot and wrap the foot in a scarf which he handed to Wedderkop; so Wedderkop removed the rags and began to unlace the boot. They were now driving down into a hollow and along the bottom of a defile before climbing up the other side. In its frozen whiteness the defile with its abrupt walls looked scarcely different from when in the Ice Age a glacier had hewn it out in the steppe. The lorry was on the farther slope of it. Wedderkop had unwrapped the rags and loosened the bootlace. Steiger ground his teeth; the devouring pain was not in the foot, but higher. "Pull, please, pull the boot down with a jerk," he said. Wedderkop needed more room, and the driver switched on

the headlights to make sure there were none of the snow figures of that night in sight. Not till then did he get into neutral and stop the lorry.

But the snow figures were there.

The way up to the plain led through a ravine running west of and towards the general direction. In a side gully, not visible from this side of the curve, were two marooned lorries. The freight of wounded which they carried was as frozen as the others. But here in the curve and on the slope, where vehicles were forced to drive slowly, were gathered all who had been able to drag themselves so far. They lurked in hiding behind the snow walls of the gully. They were as desperate as dying men who do not want to die; they were as cunning as the primitive hunters of prehistoric times. The experiences of that night had made them so.

Everything happened at once. Wedderkop pulled off the boot, and with it—leather, rags, skin, flesh were one gelatinous mass—he pulled off the frozen foot; and on his lap lay the clean, bare bones of Steiger's foot. Wedderkop screamed, recoiled, turned away—but where could he turn his horrified eyes? There was only the windscreen—and there in the glare of the headlamps he saw a figure coming towards him, and as its feet broke off like glass it fell forward on its face. And not only one, there was a whole crowd of them. Rising out of the gully, with bandaged heads, arms in splints, torsos in plaster, swather in blankets, rags, canvas, they limped, they stumbled, they fell and falling splintered their bones, got up again, and all, even those lying on the ground, all hurried. "One, two . . . ten," counted Wedderkop, wholly absently. Ten grey, crawling, squirming human worms, trying to accomplish what others were doing that still had feet. A head, streaming with blood, rose out of the snow and fell back again. Another figure was stabbing a pointed object—it was part of a motor-jack—into the ground in front of it and pulling itself forward. The one that had first fallen was wriggling nearer on arms and belly and thighs. All were coming nearer, and those that still had feet were already swarming over the lorry. Hands were clutching at door-handles, striving to get a hold on bonnet, running-boards, sides of the vehicle, tearing at the canvas, clutching at faces and eyes, scrambling over the load of wounded. A shot rang out, the windscreen splintered. Behind screamed the wounded, crushed under the weight

of the invaders. The engine coughed, the lorry started again, up the slope in first gear; then as the driver slammed into second and third and leapt ahead at full speed the confused mass of hands and bones on bonnet, running-boards and sides fell off again.

And it was not a hunted beast fleeing from primitive men; not a mammoth wounded by axes and maddened with pain. It was a Daimler-Benz machine with a 90-horse-power Diesel oil-engine, a six-wheeler with front and rear-wheel drive, that fled howling through the night, leaping over holes and bouncing over the uneven ground and leaving a huge wake of flying snow behind it. And it was not 300,000 years ago—it happened in the night of the 12th-13th of January, 1943, on the way from Rossoshka ravine to the Karpovka-Pitomnik road.

On the 12th of January the dressing-stations at Karpovka, Dmitrevka, Novo Alexeyevka and Baburkin were evacuated. At each of them from 300 to 450 seriously wounded men, wrapped only in blankets, were loaded on to open lorries. Some of the lorries ran out of petrol on the way, others stuck fast in snow-drifts. The convoy went to pieces, and of the thirty vehicles only five reached their destination. Of all the doctors only one, the senior M.O. of a casualty clearing station in the Rossoshka valley, disobeyed the order. Ignoring the entreaties, howls, oaths, curses, ignoring the whole wretchedness of the men concerned, he distributed all the narcotics in the place and declared that they must stay behind. That happened at one place only. The seriously wounded of all the other casualty clearing stations and dressing stations were put on the road; not to Pitomnik airfield to be flown out of the Stalingrad ring, but to the field hospital between Gumrak and Stalingrad, which was nothing but a collection-point for the largest Stalingrad cemetery.

"Howl away. . . ." Thus had spoken the man whose foot had been drawn off like a muddy sock, who had a scarf and a piece of blanket wrapped round the bones, and who now sat in his seat and forgot the pain and the devouring fire up to his knee.

"Howl away, it shows you're on the way!"

On the way to what? Wedderkop did not ask that question. With those faces still before his eyes, the noise of splintering bones still in his ears, paralysed with horror, he could think of nothing.

Steiger said, "Hard, horny hands, that doesn't mean strength. And a hard, horny soul—there's usually nothing behind it. Howl away, it's the best thing you can do! The peasant bent with toil, or the woman with a child in her womb, is far stronger than the infantryman marching through lands with a weight of thirty-five pounds in his pack."

He talked on about strength, about freedom, about God. He spoke of bending the knee, of climbing, of fear, of animals crossing a rapid river and helping one another to reach the other side. And, deadened with pain, he fell back in his seat.

Wedderkop understood enough to call Sonthofen and his training there "a mental bending of the knee." And he said that a whole nation had been made to bend the knee, but this attempt to take away the freedom, the soul and the way of life of other nations was doomed to failure and—God be praised!—at this very hour was beginning to fail. To have robbed a whole nation of will and conscience and turned it into a rigid machine was more ghastly than the road they had just travelled, for it was the cause of many such roads. The Nazis had attempted the impossible. He who climbs must come down again. But the army and the soldiers falling back from this gigantic climb were falling there, where Steiger and Wedderkop had seen them—and none helped another, no lorry pulled another out, so deep was the plunge, so low they had sunk.

Steiger recovered consciousness. It was a white, empty world that he looked into, and they were empty eyes that he had beside him.

"Those men behind, why are they thrown away like rotten wood, what are they dying for?" he asked Wedderkop.

Wedderkop ran his hand over his brow.

"For the Führer!" said the driver.

Captain Steiger said: "We're dying for nothing . . . it's ghastly!"

A LITTLE ROOM, BARE WALLS, WHITE CURtains; a simple desk; in the light of the desk-lamp two men. One was Colonel Schuster, adjutant to the chief of personnel at the War Office in Berlin; the other was Lieutenant-Colonel Carras, who at this late hour had been summoned by telephone from his flat.

In spite of his forty-eight years Lieutenant-Colonel Carras was still a young-looking man. In that he seemed to vie with his wife who after nineteen years of marriage still looked like a twenty-eight-year-old. He was also a man of easy and rapid understanding. But what he had just been told had bowled him over completely. He stared aghast at his colleague opposite, with whom, off duty, he was on friendly terms.

He took a grip on himself. "*Heil, nein!*" he said. "Listen, I don't mind what I do. I volunteered for El Alamein. And now—Tripoli if you like, or Tunis or Irak, or by parachute into the U.S.A.—I'm game for anything with any sense in it. But this! Have they gone crazy? It's utterly senseless!"

His friend Schuster became official. Once again he read out his transfer to the 6th Army. Utterly senseless, Carras insisted. The 6th Army was caught in a rat-trap, and neither Satan nor Hitler could get it out. He had just met a captain outside who had also been drafted to the 6th Army. Yes, but this captain had an uncle, a general, who had permitted himself some pretty strong criticism of the leadership. You could understand a man with an uncle like that landing in the 6th Army—it was a death sentence, pure and simple. But he, Lieutenant-Colonel Carras, a man of recognised worth, with no such uncle, a man with a future before him—unthinkable, *himmel-herrgottsakrament*, utterly absurd!

But the decision had been made.

When Carras came out of the chief's room, to which Schuster had taken him, and walked through the long, silent corridors to the stairs, he was no longer Lieutenant-Colonel Carras but Colonel Carras. He had been informed of his promotion and told that the nominal reason for his transfer to the 6th Army was to acquire experience in the duties of an artillery commander; but that he was also being honoured with a special, a particularly delicate task, entrusted to him by the Führer himself. And he must fly there to-morrow morning.

Colonel Carras went home. He lived in the old West, near the Bellevue bank of the Spree, in a flat that had formerly been occupied by a Jewish doctor. The tubular steel furniture and the glassware were new to the flat; other things, such as the huge writing-table in the study, the heavy bookcases, the rows of books, the Buddhas and

Chinese idols on the shelves, and the samplers on the walls, had been taken over from the former occupant. It looked rather old-fashioned, but a modern touch had been added by a " charming picture of Hitler " in golden-brown tones, the fleshy nose and upper half of the face over-shadowed by the big cap-peak.

The " Colonel " must be celebrated. And there was another thing—to say good-bye. He had told his wife nothing of a transfer, certainly not of a transfer to the 6th Army; he would not spoil the last evening with this bitter pill. To her question, " Shall we ring up Schultes or somebody? " he had replied. " No, put your things on: let's have this evening to ourselves."

A little later, as he laid the moleskin cape round his wife's shoulders, both standing in front of the wardrobe mirror, as his eyes caressed the shoulders, hair and face reflected in the glass, she guessed his secret. But he continued to play his part. He was celebrating his promotion, not some sad farewell, perhaps—*himmel-herrgott!*—for ever.

The lift was out of order again; they groped down the dark stairway. They took the tram, got off at the second stop, then continued on foot. It was damp and cold; the fourth winter of the war. Wild rumours in the streets—El Alamein, Tripoli, the Eastern Front—the heavy depressing atmosphere of the fourth war-time New Year. Margot shivered as they walked through the darkness between the Zoo Station and the Wittenbergplatz. " When the blackout's lifted we shan't be able to find our way through the streets! " he jested.

At Horcher's in the Lutherstrasse everything was as usual. Warmth, light, noiselessly efficient waiters, somewhat older than before. At the next table sat a Luftwaffe major with an actress.

" Were you in Africa? "

" Yes, and I can tell you a few things about . . ."

Crete, Sicily, the Valley of the Po—so much Carras heard. So they too were withdrawing to the inner line! A little farther off sat a panzer general, still a young man; " a hell of a career " he must have had. The rest were civilians and acquaintances from the War Office.

Margot gave no sign as the dinner was served, though she must have observed that it was costing half his pay. Usually when they dined out, it was at Kempinski's or at

Rosch's on the Kurfürstendamm, where, on handing over the necessary coupons, one could still get a decent meal. When money was tight, Margot had often been to "Wurstmax" and dined on hot sausages, when they were still obtainable. But to-day it had to be Horcher's; it had to be caviare and vodka and turtle soup; Moselle with the fish; with the pheasant a fine Bordeaux; as a sweet, pastries, fruit and cheese. *Herrgott*, what a life one could have if one was allowed to! The delicate clink of glasses—a look into Margot's eyes—and for a moment one floats in eternity.

"Margot!"

"Hans!"

Nothing more, not a word about the "Colonel." Margot understood that here something else was being celebrated. Twenty years—and it had gone like a flash. She was looking at him with the same eyes—in no other eyes had he seen that combination of dreamy abstraction and pagan frankness—the same eyes as when, still a girl, she had stolen out early one morning and they had wandered through the mist into the day and drunk fresh milk in a Friesian farmhouse; and she, seated in front of the blazing log-fire, had dried her feet and her wet stockings. Had not that day really been their wedding-day? Twenty years—and no one would have thought that she had an eighteen-year-old son, Hans-Otfried, fallen at Veliki Luki for Führer and Reich. To-night, in proud mourning, she wore the gay Paris necklace he had once bought her.

Later they left the exalted atmosphere of Horcher's, where the lordly waiters excluded "outsiders" in a manner that cured them of any desire to come again, and went "among the people." At the Zoo they sat in the "Frasquita," which was open all night; Carras had always wanted to see it. Soldiers on leave passing through Berlin, and bombed-out people who had the necessary money, were sitting here enjoying themselves, waiting to continue their journeys in the morning.

Cabaret. "Hans Moser and Paul Hörbiger request the pleasure of . . ."

Although Carras had not much taste for that sort of nonsense, for good or ill he had to listen to Moser's patter. Presently he escaped to the bar, where Margot and he—an island in all the hubbub—enjoyed another happy hour.

When at last they started for home the trams were no longer running, there was neither taxi nor any other conveyance, and they had to go through the Zoo gardens on foot. Margot's black silk shoes were ruined; but they got home at last.

Carras had not merely played the part of the young lover; he had really been back in the first days of their love. At day-break, when he found himself alone in bed and stretched himself luxuriously in the warmth, he did not know whether he was the eighteen-year-old Otfried or the forty-eight-year-old Hans Carras. Nor could he remember—had he told her or not ?

But she already knew.

He rose, bathed and dressed, and sat down at the breakfast table. Everything was ready. His travelling bag was packed; there was no need to look—he could be sure that nothing had been forgotten.

" Stalingrad! "

" Hans! "

" Margot! "

Carras closed the door behind him; and more than a door closed. He knew that what remained behind was Life. Whether the door would ever open to him again he did not know. An hour later he sat in the plane.

Beneath the wings of the JU lay the grey sea of stone that was Berlin. Scarcely had Carras looked round and observed the pilot manipulating the throttle and the wireless operator paying out the antenna and preparing his apparatus, when the city glided away below him and the railroad to Adlershof and the eastern industrial suburbs come into view. The bright surface glittering between the bare wintry fields and the grey-tufted heath was the Müggelsee. The flight continued above the winding ribbon of the Spree, on to the Oder, and ever farther.

Carras was accompanied by a number of men, allotted to him for his special task. Also on board was Captain Döllwang, the captain with the uncle who was a general, the captain with the " death sentence." Döllwang was twenty-four years old and an unusually gifted young man. Like Carras, he was from the War Office and now posted to the 6th Army—" to gain command experience," as the War Office put it.

Lvov. . . . Vinnitsa. . . . Mariupol.

At Lvov, the first stop, planes were continually landing and taking off.

"What a commotion!" remarked Döllwang.

Carras, with Döllwang, sought the commandant of the air-field. A whole swarm of JUs touched down one after another, ran along the runway, stopped and parked in the snow. If a cabin door opened as one walked by, a draught of white vapour and the odour of carbolic blew into one's face. All these machines were coming in from the east, loaded with wounded.

Carras and Döllwang found the commandant surrounded by a number of Luftwaffe men who had flown in from Sicily by way of Munich and Krakov and wanted to spend the night here.

"It's out of the question! We've flown two thousand kilometres, and in two hours it'll be dark!" Carras heard the squadron-leader say.

The commandant replied: "I can't help you, gentlemen. By order of the Reichsmarschall, no machine en route to stay longer than absolutely necessary for servicing and refuelling. Any delaying of a front-line plane will be the subject of an immediate court-martial."

The Luftwaffe men were obliged to take off again before dark. The JU with Carras had to continue its flight too, first to Kalinovka in the Ukraine, there to refuel and fly on to Vinnitsa.

Next day they flew to Mariupol, again to stay overnight. In Berlin Carras had been putting his own interpretation on War Office reports about "defensive battles, withdrawal according to plan" and so on. But at Vinnitsa, and again at Mariupol, he heard airmen speaking of the bombing of railway-stations, locomotives, and trains carrying war-material—not Russian but German war-material! Twenty, thirty, forty wagons in one place, fifty, sixty in another! To Carras these stories seemed incredible; at first he was tempted to think that the whole airfield and everybody on it ought to be in a mad-house.

Kamensk, Millerovo, Morosovski, Salsk, Valuiki were mentioned. "Good God, where does the front run now?" he heard Döllwang ask. "You'll soon see!" was the reply of a Luftwaffe captain.

There was another passenger now, a Captain Henkel, a reservist who had been in charge of a printing-unit in

Kharkhov. In order to be really in it, he declared, he had applied to be sent to Stalingrad.

And the next day, on the last hop, they did see. First they flew low, sometimes only twenty metres from the ground. Carras sat at the window. After passing Taganrog he saw below him the estuary of the Don—blue, frozen waterways turned into military roads. Marching columns, among them cattle, peasants, peasant women, horses and carts, sledges, were moving like long processions of ants crawling towards the town of Azov and towards the sea.

Fleeing troops! Incredible—yet unmistakable! The JU was flying low enough for them to see that these were *German* troops! Farther on, too, as they flew close to the ground, leaving the frozen Don to the left, and farther still, on the steppe, they passed over columns of vehicles. Light and heavy motors, trucks, workshop and passenger vans seemed to be racing and trying to overtake one another in the deep snow. Tanks, one with the turret off, another without tracks, running on the bare rollers, lines of infantrymen winding through the snow like grey caterpillars—all these the JU left behind to sink below the horizon. . . . A broad white steppe, and on it dead horses, toppled guns; a train of horse-drawn medium guns, some of the horses tangled in the reins and some lying dead in the snow, no driver with them, far and near not a man in sight.

And where was the front? Suddenly they were in the midst of ack-ack fire—and still they had seen no front! The JU climbed up through the clouds. Above the roof of clouds was bright sunshine; some 2,000 metres to the left was another JU, also flying eastwards; nothing else but bright, empty space. After an hour, they descended again, piercing the unbroken roof of clouds. Below stretched a huge town—or was it a gigantic quarry? Roofless buildings, ragged house-fronts, jagged spikes of stone jutting up like giant toothpicks—they were now over Stalingrad. The JU circled, then made a smooth landing on Pitomnik airfield.

A broad white landing ground with little trace of snow. But there was animation on the airfield. It had begun as soon as the arriving JU was heard in the air; and now hordes of wounded men were limping and stumbling over the ground. The plane was immediately surrounded, the cabin doorway blocked by tattered figures, bandaged

heads and arms and faces blue with cold. It was almost impossible to get the luggage out. The sentries had first to clear a lane; and only with great difficulty could the wounded on stretchers be manœuvred through it and into the plane. In half an hour the JU was to take off again. And what had happened to the other machine, which was bringing bread from Mariupol? There was no sign of it.

Carras was handed his valise—now only the battered wreck of a valise.

"I just managed to rescue it. The whole crowd trampled on it—and it's burst open, Herr Oberst!" said his batman, raising the lid that now refused to close.

Everything lay in confusion—pyjamas, shaving tackle, a photo album, snow picked up with the things as they had been collected; the same valise that Margot, only 48 hours before, had so carefully packed. But Carras had no time for his own thoughts or even to snarl at his batman or at that horde of savages. An officer in furs and fur cap came up, behind him a second officer, a third, a fourth. The first was the flight controller, the second an officer of the supply depot. All of them wanted to know something—whether the plane had brought bread, oil, spirit, foodstuffs, a case containing a U-Boat receiving-set, a UKW apparatus. . . . All raged at his ignorance and rushed away. To his own questions Carras received no answer.

Only when the JU with its heavy load of wounded—some had been lifted in on stretchers and others had fought their way in—rose into the air, and he found himself left alone with this limping, stumbling mob—he could find no better word for them, there were hundreds all striving to reach the edge of the airfield—only then did he manage to find out who was the flight controller, who the commandant of the airfield, and who this captain so utterly beside himself. He learned that Army H.Q. was no longer in Gumrak but in a ravine farther east, and that if no armoured car were sent for him it was quite out of the question to detail a vehicle for his journey.

It was 15.10 hours and pitch dark when at last a lorry stopped outside the cave in which Carras was waiting. He got in front with the driver; Captain Döllwang and Captain Henkel had to climb in behind with the men.

Direction Gumrak and on to Stalingrad. Driving snow; the windscreen-wiper in continual movement. Carras saw no land—nothing but high waves of snow. He had the

sensation of having left the ground, of flying, though unimaginably slowly, for the driver never got beyond second gear and most of the way corkscrewed in first gear through what seemed endless chaos.

At last the lorry halted. Captain Döllwang had reached his destination. His face appeared at the driver's window. The driver opened the door.

" Which way? " Döllwang wanted to know.

" Over there, you can't miss it, Herr Hauptmann! " shouted the driver, and pointed at right angles to the road across the endless white waves. " A mile or so, then downhill into the ravine—that's where divisional staff have been since yesterday."

" Drive there! " Carras ordered.

" Herr Oberst, there's only enough petrol for the direct trip. And if we get stuck nobody's going to pull us out! "

Captain Döllwang took leave of them. Carras saw him a small suit case in his hand, sink up to his knees, then up to the edge of his short fur coat and wade ahead. Following him like a grey spectre was Henkel.

Döllwang certainly had his death sentence in his pocket. But Carras, what was *he* here for? What was *his* task? Artillery commander—that was piffle, of course! Over and above that—a special and honourable mission, entrusted to him by the highest authority: to stiffen a number of jelly-boned gentlemen (he had been given their names), and to bolster up to the highest degree, by any means, gentle or drastic, the morale of officer and man, of unit, and of army.

Stalingrad was the key position!

Yes, but . . . absurd, utterly absurd . . . incredible . . . forty-eight hours ago he was still in Berlin!

. . . . . .

A hole in the ground; a table; on the table a general-staff map. Bent over the map a number of heads—the tanned bald pate of Major-General Gönnern, the heads of his Ia and his I.O., of the Chief of Corps Staff, Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht, and of the Corps Artillery Commander, General Vennekohl. By the table stood the newly-arrived Captain Döllwang and Captain Henkel.

The senior officers' attention was not concentrated on the general-staff map but on a sketch of Vilshofen's lying on it, which he had had delivered by Lieutenant Wedderkop. This sketch was, in fact, a thick exclamation mark, a triple

exclamation mark, to the situation. It showed the area between Volga and Don, and at the bend of the Volga the town of Stalingrad. The front line running from north of Stalingrad towards the west and back to the Volga enclosed a space shaped like a heart. This was the front line of yesterday and the day before.

Three thrusts of the beseigers were directed at the airfield and village of Pitomnik. The eyes fixed on the sheet of paper no longer saw a heart-shape; they saw only half a heart. The question was, could this half heart still live, and was it possible to sew up the cut and bleeding surface?

That was the meaning of the questions that Vilshofen had appended to his sketch: " How is ' Violet ' to be done? If ' Violet ' can't be done, what then? Have the gentlemen decided about that? "

Resistance-line " Violet " was drawn so as to include Pitomnik airfield. But according to all reports, after the deep enemy penetrations from north, south and west, only parts of the retreating divisions had taken up the intended positions, and the whereabouts of other parts were quite unknown. Two of these divisions no longer existed, and of a third there were only remnants—but Gönnern, Unschlicht and Vennekohl had no desire to go into that yet. It should have been obvious by now that " Violet " was nothing but a line on paper; that out in the reality of the snowfields there were only hordes of men in bloody retreat, defending themselves behind temporary bolt positions and, cut off from one another, trying to make their way towards the east.

The officers turned to Unschlicht, who, as Chief of Corps Staff, ought to have a better idea of the general situation than the others. But he merely shrugged his shoulders and said: " Information and reports have been very scanty up to now, and we're still waiting for others to come in, so it's hard to get a proper picture of the whole situation."

" But how does Vilshofen come to take such a catastrophic view of it? " asked Gönnern.

" Oh, he can hear the grass growing! " said Vennekohl. " But still, all I can see in the whole wide field is your few men, Gönnern, and Lundt's regiment—and of course, Vilshofen's group."

" In fact it looks as if only the 113th and the 76th and

parts of the 44th have carried out the withdrawal," remarked Unschlicht.

" The farther south and the bigger the swing to be made, the farther they had to go—and they just didn't make it," said Vennekohl. " As I understand it, Vilshofen's sketch hits the nail on the head. ' Violet ' can't be done at all now; I tip ' Sunflower '."

" Sunflower " was a planned resistance-line still farther back. Running from the north, in the region of Borodkim, it left the Pitomnik airfield outside and followed the railway southwards to Voroponovo station, then turned into the southern fringe of the Stalingrad urban district.

What if the divisions fail to make the distance, and if they fail to take up their positions on " Sunflower "? That was the fateful question. But they did not care to answer it, nor to look the consequences in the face.

" It's not for us to answer all the questions that crop up! " cried Gönnern. " No, it's not for us, it's not for us! "

And it was not up to them—unless they rose against their leadership and against their highest " Führer " and made the fate of their men their own concern.

After an interval of gloomy silence Gönnern said: " Everything depends on Pitomnik, the only usable airfield. With Pitomnik we stand or fall. Our job is to block the road to Pitomnik." Well knowing that he was wasting words, he was glad to take his mind off the general situation. " That concerns you particularly, Döllwang! " he turned to Döllwang, and his thoughts digressed still farther.

He knew old Döllwang, the uncle, had known him for twenty years. What was happening with old Döllwang now, he thought, was the end of a long development going back to the time of Colonel-General von Fritsch. Of course, Fritsch had been right; and so far Döllwang was right to-day about what was happening and about those who had caused it. A far-away look came into Gönnern's eyes. For the second time within an hour he was thinking the same thoughts. But why should these things concern this young man, who had nothing to do with them? Command experience—of course, every general-staff man needed practical experience. But what experience could he get here? And what time remained to him to apply his experience?

" You were to have a battalion, Döllwang. But I've no regiment left and we've got no battalions left. We've had

to combine our units, and now we're making up combat-groups from the remnants. I think we'll send you to Vilshofen. That'll be all right, won't it?"

The last question was addressed to the Chief of Corps Staff, who confirmed Gönnern's suggestion.

"I've detained Wedderkop; he'll be able to take Döllwang forward," said the Ia.

"And Captain Henkel?"

"Captain Henkel is posted to Lundt's regiment."

"Well, that's settled. Good luck!"

Döllwang, accompanied by the Ia, left the dugout. Gönnern stood looking after him. He went on staring absently for a while after Döllwang had vanished. For the third time in this hour the same thought occurred to him. He had applied it to himself and his own situation, and to his old friend Döllwang; now he applied it to the nephew, the young captain. This time, before turning to other matters, he uttered the thought aloud: "We are expendable!"

Döllwang and Wedderkop, both young men, both with a military upbringing, differed from each other. The training of the one had been directed to objective and practical things; that of the other to the formal, the irrational and the impossible. But inherent traits had not been altogether suppressed. It was not by chance that Döllwang loved music and could surrender himself utterly to a melody or to the flowing, eddying, swelling, harmony-creating stream of a musical work. To him music was not a mere relaxation: it was the other side of his being. He could equally forget himself when absorbed in his work with compasses and slide-rule.

There was a great difference between the two young men. When Döllwang had an abstract problem to solve, such as the moving of a 1,000-ton load over a distance of 100 kilometres, it was for him a matter of the calculation of a given horse-power (of engine or animal), of quality of performance and type of load, of difficulties and possibilities. As a boy he had observed how cart-wheels sink into sandy ground to turn more slowly than on the smooth road. On his uncle's estate he had learned that certain quantities of certain substances are necessary to produce certain physical performances or to produce other substances: oats and green fodder and corn to produce draught-work or milk or eggs. He knew that one cannot put a cow

between the shafts of a wagon and then milk her in the evening. And warmth, affection, peace were familiar to him in their most elementary manifestations—a nest of young birds, the velvet nose of a horse, the pointed muzzle of a dog thrust into his hands, the massive placidity of a cow chewing the cud. All these had helped to develop his nature.

Wedderkop, like everyone else, had his origins and his family, but the latter he scarcely knew except from the family photograph-album. The Herr Konsistorialrat with the frock-coat and the doleful face was his father; the lady with the high "bun" and the vertical furrow between the eyes was his mother; the other lady with the pious and devoted expression was an aunt living in the house. This family of a Potsdam church dignitary had given him life and also had to support him for a number of years; but they remained strangers to him, and he had turned away from them as he had turned away from most social conventions. They had served him mainly for the acquisition of an unexceptionable certificate of ancestry and for the invention of a line of ghostly forefathers. And not only in relation to his family but in every respect his life was a breaking away from the source: his mental existence was based as much on fiction as were the ideas of Nazi "geopolitics" and "Aryan leadership" which he served.

These two, Döllwang and Wedderkop, were now travelling the same road along which Wedderkop had come the previous night. At Pitomnik they stopped at the ration-depot where, earlier in the day, Wedderkop had received only half an issue instead of the three or four ration issues his troops were counting on. Afterwards they drove to the stragglers' assembly point, where they were to collect reinforcements for their decimated troops.

At the ration-depot—a ravine leading off and then curving back to the road, in which lay bunker after bunker stocked with meat, vegetables, coffee and tea—Wedderkop did not trouble to get out. It was just as it had been in the morning, except that darkness now lay over he many vehicles from all directions that blocked the road. There were both motors and horse wagons, the latter with horses where they had any or with Russians where there were no horses. The Russians were standing or lying about in groups, some wrapped in furs, but most of them in blankets.

"Any bread come?" the driver called.

" Yes, to the Ivans," was the answer.

" Are there any rations being issued in the ration-depot, you bloody fool? " shouted Wedderkop.

There was no answer, but further questions by the driver elicited the fact that apart from the one JU which had brought nothing, no other machine had flown in.

At the stragglers' assembly-point Wedderkop got out and presently returned with a sergeant and eight men. He stood them in front of the lorry and asked their names. The sergeant's name was August Gnotke; the others were Corporal Riess and Privates Altenhuden, Gimpf, Fell, Liebsch, Stüwe and Kalbach. The group climbed into the rear of the lorry, Wedderkop resumed his seat at the front, and they drove off.

" Funny-looking lot, not stragglers really—the remains of an alarm company. There was a sergeant-major with them; he shot himself this morning," said Wedderkop.

Döllwang thought they all looked funny—those in front of the ration-depot, the men in the staff company in the ravine, even the lieutenant and the driver here in the lorry. In Germany he had seen leave-trains full of tired, set faces, and he had seen ambulance trains too. But here the whole atmosphere was one seething weariness, a single fermenting wound. It was not the front-line officer Wedderkop, who for fifty days had been on the downward path with the men, who felt most deeply the hopelessness of the situation; it was the young general-staff officer Döllwang, to whom two days before, Stalingrad had been nothing more than an abstract thing marked with red and blue lines on general-staff maps. Colonel Carras's valise trampled on by a disorderly mob of frightened soldiers—that was perhaps an isolated incident. An airfield commandant, flight-controller, supply officer, all obsessed with the thought of a bread delivery; a driver saying he hadn't enough petrol and ignoring an order; a staff sentry dressed like a tramp; that concourse of vehicles in front of the ration-depot; horses—Döllwang had looked carefully at them—on which even under the rime-covered shaggy hair the lines of hunger were visible; even the casual remark about a sergeant-major " . . . shot himself this morning "—all isolated incidents perhaps. But they mounted up, and in the space of four hours—so long Döllwang had now been in the Stalingrad ring—they had grown to such an array that, taken together, they were an unmistakable symptom of a

situation that could no longer be ignored; a situation that had as great a claim to be marked on the divisional commander's and the C.-in-C.'s maps as had the red arrows showing the direction of the Russian attacks; whereby Döllwang mentally indicated the remaining fighting power of the Russian Army with a big question mark.

One thing was obvious. Here was a beaten, exhausted, bleeding, louse-ridden, morally prostrated horde—and it would take a lot to turn it into an army again! What was needed to accomplish that was: rest and care, and again rest and care, and afterwards armaments and intense training. But Döllwang was not here to worry about the needs of the army. He had been sent to gain experience of leadership in a small unit.

The road they were driving along led through snow, at first with many tyre tracks, but later showing few traces on the broad white surface. Lorries stood by the roadside, looking in the distance like low white cliffs in the moonlight: but in driving past one saw that they were nothing but snow-covered wrecks. On the roadway or by the roadside, at first singly, then like a running chain, lay grey bundles, with here a foot, there a hand, jutting out of the snow.

The way led down into a ravine. Here again stood two lorries, and it looked as if a battle had been fought there. Wedderkop groaned. The driver turned his head and looked at him, then at Döllwang. Wedderkop said: "Yes, crumbling to bits, the whole . . ."

His voice was tinny. Döllwang could make nothing of this: he awaited an explanation. But Wedderkop changed the subject.

"They had to take Steiger off me, anyway," he said. "Captain Steiger, the defender of the Kazatchi Hills. Of course that made no impression at Pitomnik. Those bone-menders have got absolutely no idea—stand there cutting and sawing all day, and see and hear nothing else. Didn't want to take Steiger—but I laid him on the table in front of them. . . . He was your predecessor, by the way, Herr Hauptmann."

"Well, driver, we must be nearly there, or else we'll be landing ourselves among the Russians," he said presently. And indeed they soon arrived. A figure stood at the roadside, a sentry.

"Combat group Vilshofen?"

"On the other side of the road."

Vilshofen's group had occupied some deserted dugouts to the north of the Baburkin-Pitomnik road. With the group on the other side of the road they were barring this route to Pitomnik. These two groups formed a part of resistance-line "Violet." To the north the line curved by Bolshaya Rossoshka, Borotkin and Kusmitcha, where it cut across the great gorge nicknamed "Death Valley," and ran as far as the Stalingrad factory district and the Volga; to the south it cut the Stalingrad-Tazinskaya railway-line, turned east by Voroponovo and Petchanka, and also ran to Stalingrad and the Volga. The base along the banks of the Volga measured some thirty kilometres, and the distance over and beyond Pitomnik some forty kilometres. That was a temporary "shape" and one that, apart from the line along the Volga, changed nightly between sunset and sunrise. By day the men died in their positions; by night they marched and died on the march. These troops, threatened with destruction, lay in the icy wind, striving to avoid serious contact with the enemy and fighting only rearguard actions. They no longer tried to dig themselves in: they had given that up. In order they withdrew, in order they took up the new positions allotted to them. Where they found no prepared positions and no dugouts they sheltered behind a railway embankment, in ditches on the steppe, or in the open field behind walls of snow. This ring of infantry, a ring hammered thin and fragile, still enclosed a thousand square kilometres of steppe from Volga to Volga—room enough for the artillery and tank units, for work-shops, staffs, hospitals and stores; and room enough for the despair, paralysis, panic, sickness and dying of the disintegrating army.

That thin ring of infantry was to hold. It had the same function as the shell of an egg: if it broke, the contents would instantly run out and there would be nothing but pus and blood and stench, for the egg was rotten—the germ was gone, or the spark of life was never in it. What was being hatched out of this huge mass was nothing but a gigantic monstrosity.

Colonel Vilshofen lay stretched on a pile of old clothing, in boots and fur greatcoat, fur cap fastened over his ears. In the midst of giving instructions for the disposal of his men for the night he had been overcome with fatigue; he had told his adjutant to wake him in two minutes. The

adjutant sat on a stool. It was cold; there was no door. Colonel and adjutant were in what an hour before had been an empty cave. A hole in the clay wall was the fireplace; pieces of a wrecked car, including bits of rubber, were burning there. Smoke curled slowly to the exit. Black smuts were dropping from the roof and settling on Vilshofen's face. They reminded him of a dense black flock of crows he had seen sitting on the wreck of a lorry, which had not risen as he marched by alone. Only when the head of his column behind him reached the spot had they fluttered up—he had heard them screeching.

Formerly it had been horse-carcases on which the crows fed; this time it was from lorries full of frozen human flesh that, with a heavy beating of wings, they staggered upwards in such numbers that they seemed like a rising black cloud.

Colonel Vilshofen stirred. His adjutant stood before him, watch in hand. He was tempted to wake his commander at once; but he waited for the fourth half-minute. As Vilshofen felt a hand on his shoulder and opened his eyes to behold first the smoking lamp on its nail and then the youthful features of Lieutenant Latte above him, he was still in the grip of something else. But this was no dream—the clay wall, the lamp, Lieutenant Latte before his eyes: this was reality.

Colonel Vilshofen sprang up.

He fell back in amazement—Döllwang, washed, shaved, smooth, with clear, intelligent eyes! Impossible! Yet it was as real as the horror that was still within him.

Walter Döllwang stood before him.

"Posted to combat group Vilshofen," he heard, saw, too, the outstretched hand. Not that, not that, anything but that! And Döllwang, at the sight of that hollow, burned-out face with eyes glowing like torches, had to pull himself together to conceal his alarm at the changed aspect of his father's friend.

The tension was relieved by the entry of Wedderkop reporting back with his transport. He had left Captain Steiger at the Pitomnik field-hospital; the other wounded —except for two—he had taken not to Gumrak hospital but to Gumrak cemetery. And—this made the deepest impression on Vilshofen—he had brought with him half-a-day's issue of food.

Half-a-day's issue! 50 grammes of bread (a slice plus a

little corner), 8 grammes of peas (seven peas) for dinner, 25 grammes of meat for supper, 5 grammes of coffee or tea: that was then a full day's ration. And Wedderkop had received only half that!

Döllwang stood by Vilshofen, who ordered and superintended the immediate distribution of the rations—except for the peas. For each man that passed by and held out his hand Vilshofen had a word or at least a smile. But he comforted none: his encouragements were of a grimmer kind. It took a Döllwang, who had known Vilshofen as a taciturn man who carefully weighed his words, to discern the lacerated, suffering soul behind the words.

In front of him an outstretched dirty, soldier hand, a slice of bread and on it a thumb-sized piece of tinned meat. "Confoundedly thin, eh, Hannes?"

To the next: "Divide it up carefully, so there's something left for the morning."

To the third: "How many pigs has your old man got at home, Vogt?" "Only one left, Herr Oberst." "There you are, shows things are getting tight there too."

To the fourth, a schoolmaster: "Don't forget to masticate well—it prolongs the enjoyment."

To the fifth: "How many children have you got, Wilsdruff?" "You know I've got five, Herr Oberst." "Good thing you haven't got to share with your family!"

To the sixth: "Well, Matzke, poor devil—taking your last steps? I'd have wished you a better hangman's breakfast!"

He did not miss one of them.

"The table's laid, here we are!"

"And now forward and finish up with a Strauss waltz." (The nightly propaganda broadcasts from the Russian positions were introduced with music.) "What piece was that they were playing last night?" he asked the next man.

"From 'Rigoletto,' Herr Oberst."

"Well, don't let me hear you butting in again, Müller—you're still the same old scatterbrain! See what happens —yesterday it got us a symphony out of the Stalin organ! Go over to Ivan—I've already told you to! Run over to Ivan, the lot of you, it's all going kaputt here. I won't stop anybody!"

And so on. With everything he said, whether it was encouragement or a farewell to one with the mark of death already on him, or whether it sounded like treason,

Vilshofen was in deadly earnest The sorry procession passed by, ageless figures, some of them human wrecks. Each was personally addressed; there was none that did not get at least a look, a grim smile; and not one of the dull faces failed to light up for a moment.

The new arrivals, brought from Pitomnik, lined up.

"What's your name, Sergeant?"

"Gnotke, Herr Oberst."

"Where were you before?"

"At Dmitrevka, Herr Oberst."

"And before that?"

"In the Punishment Battalion, Herr Oberst."

"And before that?"

"In front of Moscow, Herr Oberst."

"And before that—before you were in the army?"

"In the S.A., Herr Oberst."

"And before that, Sergeant Gnotke?"

"At home at Klein-Stepenitz in Pomerania, Herr Oberst"

"That was the best, eh?"

"*Jawohl*, that was the best, Herr Oberst."

"Well, let's hope you get back there some day, Gnotke."

But Gnotke was not yet dismissed. "Well, and your men—who's this?"

"Corporal Riess, Herr Oberst."

"Well, go on, what is there to say about Riess?"

"Riess is fit; he always fetched the rations at Dmitrevka. He used to be in the S.S. He's doing his service. He plays *Doppelkopp** off duty."

"That right, Riess?"

"*Jawohl*, Herr Oberst."

"Next!"

"Private Altenhuden. He's from Pomerania too, Herr Oberst."

"All right. Next!"

"Private Gimpf, Herr Oberst."

This time Vilshofen did not say, "All right—next!" He turned his eyes—only a few days ago they had been called violet eyes and now they seemed to Döllwang like gleaming torches—he turned them searchingly on Gimpf's face, which began to work as if with uneasy thought.

"Well, Herr Oberst, I don't rightly know—there's nothing much wrong with him. During the break-through

* A card game.

at Kletskaya he lay down in the dugout and wanted to stay there, and afterwards he wanted to lie down on the road. At Vertyatchi he didn't seem to care what happened to him, and he was the same at Dmitrevka. . . ."

"Then you've come a long way together?"

"Yes, and he was with me in the Punishment Battalion too."

"And where does Gimpf come from?"

"From Alten-Affeln. He's got a mother there, and maybe she things he's a clever lad and'll be running the farm some day. . . ."

Gnotke stopped: he had not made such a long speech for a year.

"What was that in the dugout at Kletskaya?"

"Well, Herr Oberst, Sergeant-Major Aslang was sitting at the top—he was still sitting there while others were lying down. The dugout was half full, and I wasn't looking for anybody in particular, so I fetched him" (Gnotke looked at Gimpf) "out of it and kept in charge of him. And at Vertyatchi and Dmitrevka it was just the same—sometimes I had to push him along. But there's nothing wrong with him, so why is it?"

"Yes, why is it, Gnotke? Well, it takes all sorts to make a world."

"*Jawohl*, Herr Oberst, all sorts. Sergeant-Major Pöhls shot himself this morning; he was a sergeant-cook before, and he couldn't stand it at Dmitrevka. Yesterday we left Sergeant Maulhard in the snow; we couldn't drag him any farther. And at Dmitrevka Sergeant Urbas was left in the bunker—he was nearly finished anyway. . . ."

Why this one, then? That interested Vilshofen. It had not escaped him that beneath this face, stony with the recital of endless dying, another face was discernible as Gnotke talked of the problem of Gimpf. The sun can no longer awaken life in a stony desert. But it seemed that in a human desert the light could yet flicker. Man—no matter how trampled upon and shamelessly misused—is not given up and forsaken so long as he breathes and still sees his fellow-man—and be it only one. . . .

Who could have followed the winding path of his thoughts? Could Gnotke or Döllwang or Wedderkop, or any of those standing around? None knew the cause, though the effect was visible. Gnotke and Döllwang and Wedderkop and the rest standing in the ravine with its

snowy walls framing the wintry night sky above them, saw a smile on the face of their Colonel. They saw it in his eyes, saw it flicker over the lean, care-worn features like a red gleam in the sky.

The red gleam was still there when Vilshofen looked at Gimpf and spoke again: "So that's Gimpf; we'll keep an eye on him. On the others, too, Gnotke—at least on their feet. Who's this? He looks bad on his feet"

"Private Kalbach, Herr Oberst. It'd be a bad thing for his wife and children if he went. He's got swollen feet and his heart's bad."

"And who's this . . . and this . . . and this?"

"Private Stüwe, Herr Oberst. We call him 'Tünnes.' He misses his two friends that used to be with us. Private Liebich. He's worried about the rates: he's got a cottage at Masserberg in Thuringia. Private August Fell. He's always praying. Private Liebsch. He's got a weak bladder—he has to sleep underneath in the dugout."

"Right. Riess, Tünnes, Liebich, Liebsch to be excused guard now and crawl into an empty hole. And if you ever get a dugout with bunks, Liebsch of course on a bottom bunk! Sergeant Gnotke, Gimpf, Fell and Altenhuden to go forward into position."

As Vilshofen watched the men go he seemed to see two pictures. He saw them with broad, healthy faces, heads held high; and he saw them as they looked now, hollow-faced, dull-eyed, with the thin necks of old men.

The ravine had the aspect of an Indian pueblo—cave after cave, with entrances, and here and there a roof, sunken in. One of these was occupied by Vilshofen. The next—for the sake of warmth—had three inmates: Döllwang, the rations officer (Wedderkop) and the adjutant (Lieutenant Latte) had crawled into it together. Other holes housed the staff company, kitchen and office personnel, soldiers and N.C.O.s of the group. At the far end was the baggage with the guard and the Russian prisoners.

Some two hours later the sentry posted in front of staff quarters heard whistling coming from Vilshofen's cave He turned back his ear-flaps the better to hear, then he shrugged his shoulders. There was no doubt about it: he heard a gay tune. Lieutenant Latte, returning from a tour of the sentry-posts, also heard the whistling, and was no less amazed. As he entered Vilshofen's cave he saw him

standing in front of the fireplace, tall and lean, in tattered greatcoat, the ends of his scarf hanging down, the ear-flaps of his fur helmet sticking out. As this dishevelled figure in the flickering firelight turned to look at him, Latte was reminded of a picture of Don Quixote.

Vilshofen was whistling an air from "Carmen." Catching sight of Latte he said: "Life's a great thing!"

Latte had just returned from the forward position where Sergeant Matzke had collapsed and been buried in the snow.

"Life, Herr Oberst . . ." stammered Latte.

"Have you seen that new sergeant? Gnotke's his name —I've taken his paybook off him and had a look at his record. A fellow like that must be so dead here" (Vilshofen tapped his knuckles against his lean chest) "that he doesn't need any guns or mines or firing-parties. And I know the regulations—that's the way it was meant. Yet this chap clears mines, buries corpses, stews in the Don loop, stews at Veryatchi, stews in the Stalingrad ring. And not only that—he finds a Gimpf, a helpless baby, and takes care of him. Looks after a helpless baby—imagine that! His hands are not only for the dead, they're for the living too—so he himself is living and will live like a human being to the last. What a triumph! Get yourself a Gimpf, Latte, and you'll live! But *our* Gimpf would have to be the whole lot of them—not only our soldiers but the whole nation. Where are we leading our men to? And where is our nation being led? Where to, Latte?"

"Where to, Herr Oberst?"

"To death . . . and for nothing. And there's nothing worse than that!"

"And Herr Oberst whistles the Toreador's song?"

"Yes, Latte. Yesterday I wanted to give up. To-day . . . what did I want to-day? What can anyone lying dishonoured on the ground want? To lead an assault and end it all? Perhaps—when Stalingrad was still a possible goal. But now it's too late. Stalingrad has become a cauldron of death, and we're sitting in it; yes, we're sitting in it. Dog eats dog: the weak fall; the sick are left lying: that's a logical consequence. whoever is sick and can't crawl to the food-trough is of inferior race; whoever robs his neighbour and fills his own belly is of superior race and will breathe a little longer. Latte, have you seen corpses with skulls split open and brains welling out?"

"Herr Oberst!"

"*Jawohl*, I've seen them. The man who can do that in this cauldron of death is one of the élite and will probably survive."

"Allow me, Herr Oberst, to point out——"

"Don't talk to me about the Rumanians—there's quite enough been blamed on to them. Anyhow, the Rumanians didn't invent that stuff about the superior race. . . . I've seen such smashed heads, several of them, on the way here. And that's the result, that's the goal we were directed to—not only yesterday and not only since we came across the Don and the Kalmuk steppe and penetrated into the Stalingrad factory-district. That comes of the gospel of the superior race. . . . Can you hear it screeching, Latte?"

"I beg your pardon, Herr Oberst, I don't quite follow."

"Well, what is this, Latte?" Vilshofen raised his hand and touched with his finger the eagle on Latte's tunic—the crest of the new German, of the Hitler-Reich.

"The crow," said Vilshofen, "is indeed the appropriate symbol. The crow is real, he's fat, and he's perched, flapping his wings, on the rim of our cauldron. He's with us wherever we go!" Working his finger-nail between the tunic and the edge of the Hitler crest, he added: "We shall have to get away from it, we shall have to tear if off, Latte!"

"Excuse me, Herr Oberst, may I go now?"

"Yes, you may, Latte. Sleep on it, and to-morrow we'll talk about it again."

"Yes, here we are inside," thought Vilshofen as he followed Latte with his eyes. "Assaults or such ways out—no, it's too late for that. Now we've got to halt and feel on our own skins what we have done not only to a town, not only to a country, and not only to a nation. It's been a long way, and many a village has gone up in smoke, and many a . . . *Jawohl*, the fellows were fed like prize bullocks and had pot-bellies and shaving-tackle and hair-cream! We carried plunder in our steel caravans; we lived like fighting cocks, and the world rolling away under our caterpillar-tracks was cheap; and many a one that didn't jump aside quick enough—sometimes a whole crowd of 'em—fell under the triumphant caterpillar-tracks."

A few paces farther on was the hole into which Latte had crawled after his tour of the sentry posts and his visit to the colonel. It was a cave like Vilshofen's, without

door or window. Part of the roof had fallen in and the gap, like the doorway, was closed with a tarpaulin. There was a fireplace hacked out in the mud wall and now filled with glowing débris. Smoke curled up to the roof and drifted over the remains of the wall into the next dugout where soldiers lay side by side.

On this side of the wall Lieutenant Wedderkop, Lieutenant Kindt and Captain Döllwang, in uniforms and boots, lay stretched out, pressed close together, on a tarpaulin. The greatcoats with which they had covered themselves, and the tent-canvas on top of them, were frozen stiff. Coming in here after the ration distribution, they had talked little and soon fallen asleep. But Wedderkop had first retailed the news he had brought from the staff.

"The ring's confoundedly shrunk, from the west and from the south too," he had said. "It's shrunk to about half its size. The C.-in-C.'s moved again, into a balka behind Gumrak. They've chucked out General Hartmann with his staff—they'd settled in very nicely, and now they've had to move to Stalingrad. . . ."

Kindt was too exhausted to make any reply, and Döllwang was too busy with his own thoughts.

"Stalingrad with the staffs is the head, we here with our daily losses are just about the arse, and Pitomnik with the airfield is the navel through which we're fed—and so long as that's not cut off we can carry on!" With this picture Wedderkop had rounded off his "situation report" before pulling his balaclava over his face and falling asleep.

Döllwang lay awake for a long time staring into the smoke, rust-red from the glow of the fire. He heard the snoring of the men on the other side of the wall; and he thought of Berlin and of his quiet, clean room there, every-thing kept tidy by the seemingly invisible hands of his aunt. He thought of his air-trip, of the fleeing army, of the arrival at Pitomnik, and later, of the staff bunker, the front, the ration distribution, and Vilshofen. Above all he thought of Vilshofen, and of how Vilshofen had taken his answers about his uncle and about the War Office's views on the Stalingrad ring.

Hours passed. Latte stood in front of the three men sleeping under blankets and greatcoats. He awoke his relief, Lieutenant Wedderkop, and, after the latter had



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risen, crawled into his place. Now it was Latte who could not sleep. Beyond the wall he heard the sentries coming off duty. One was Wilsdruff; another was the Magdeburg bank-clerk, Krämer; the third was one of the new men, Kalbach of the bad feet.

"We've been here before," said one.

The others, too, had recognised the place where, during the hundred days of storming Stalingrad, they had once rested for a while.

"There were Croatians here in the gully," Krämer remembered. "They were having a fine time—the place was swarming with Russian women they'd kidnapped. The women carried water and did the washing and darned the socks—yes, and at night they had to sleep with them in the bunks!"

"There was nothing like that with us Germans," interpolated Kalbach.

"Think so?" said Wilsdruff. "All I know is that right here in the gully, behind, where the tank fellows were resting, there were used french letters scattered all over the place. That's what it was like when we marched by."

Latte lay listening to the men's talk till it gradually died down. Even then he could not sleep. He, too, was thinking of Vilshofen—of the tank-commander Vilshofen by Kharkhov, on the Mius, on the Don steppe, over the Zymlya, rushing over the Don and penetrating into Stalingrad. He thought of how Vilshofen on the ruins of his panzer regiment had turned into a combat-group leader. He thought of the Vilshofen of to-night—and Latte felt not only externally cold, he was frozen to the heart.

One group commander had gone mad; another had shot himself. Every day someone shot himself, every day someone went mad! And what was up with Vilshofen? Lead an assault and end it all, he'd said. He said a lot of things, but he said that too. Did he want to set up a little assault-squad and take his Latte with him? Latte was still young—was it time to die?

With such thoughts Latte at last fell asleep.

A peal of laughter, filling the whole dugout, woke him. He looked up and saw Wedderkop standing in front of him, heard him say: "Now our old man's gone mad too!"

Kindt and Döllwang woke up.

"What's up?" "Who's gone mad?"

"They ought to have shot the lot of them on the spot! That's what we've always done with such sub-humans. They set fire to a sledge and gave a signal!"

"What? Who?"

"The Russians with the baggage! But instead of having the whole gang of them beaten to a pulp he's ordered all the Russians to be left behind at the next withdrawal!"

"And who's going to pull the sledges?" asked Kindt.

"Horses belong in front of sledges—but as we've got no horses the sledges'll stay behind. From now on each man carries his own stuff, and ammo and tools'll be loaded on hand-sleds and be pulled along by the men, he said."

"Impossible!" said Lieutenant Kindt.

Lieutenant Latte's eyes clouded over, his lips trembled, he looked as if he wanted to cry.

"I tell you he's gone mad!" repeated Wedderkop. "He said we've got no more horses and no fodder for horses; we've got no food for the prisoners and we can't spare a man to guard them, not even to transport them to the rear—so the Russians stay behind!"

"That's not madness, it's a logical consequence," said Döllwang.

Kindt shook his head. Latte looked helplessly from one to the other. Wedderkop said: "Shoot 'em—that'd be the logical consequence!"

"But to shoot men because you can't feed them and can't guard them—that would be murder!"

"Excuse me, Herr Hauptmann, but that shows you only arrived on the Eastern front yesterday," said Wedderkop.

. . . . .

That was resistance line "Violet."

Hunger and cold. Numbers of soldiers crouching in the snow. No communication established between units Some units from the west were still on the march or in flight; of these some never reached the line, while others reached it only to move still farther back. One group that took up position in the line was Vilshofen's, another Keil's, another was Lundt's regiment, yet another was Buchner's flak regiment.

Only the road separated Keil's group from Vilshofen's. Major Keil was the successor of a regimental commander who had shot himself after the collapse of the western front. His group consisted of scattered units thrown

together; the core of it was the 9th East Prussian Machine-gun Battalion.

At another position in defence-line "Violet" lay Buchner's flak regiment. Gone under once at Verchnaya Businovka and once in the Kazatchi Hills, it had risen again, thanks not least to the young and energetic Lieutenant Stampfer and Sergeant-Major Minz, who had always seen to it that there was an ample stock of petrol and, above all, that supplies lay in safety a good way behind. Thus on both occasions the unit had been able to make up with guns abandoned on the roads by fleeing units; and here in the new line Buchner had set up, in addition to the 2cm. guns of his own men, a complete battery of heavy 8.8cm. flak.

Major Buchner, Lieutenant Stampfer and Sergeant-Major Minz were in the dugout, and in front of them stood Sergeant Januschek. Januschek had been at Regimental Staff and at the Pitomnik supply-depot, and the news he had brought from the Staff and had confirmed by the ack-ack group at Pitomnik made such an impression on the commander and his assistants that they sat there dumbfounded.

But Sergeant Januschek stood there and grinned.

"What are you grinning at, you ape?" Buchner wanted to know.

"Pardon, Herr Major, but I got it from Welisch and he heard it from Sepp Reisinger—he's with the signals company and he saw it—and the regimental commander sat just like you when he got the news, and they talked about a sinking ship and rats, but it wasn't a ship, it was a JU, and it wasn't a rat, it was our general sitting in it!"

"Hold your tongue, Januschek!" said Buchner.

But Januschek had not yet finished: "And the Herr Oberst—and I got this from Welisch too, and he got it from Reisinger—altogether lost countenance, and that means in plain speech that the table he was sitting at got smashed!"

Buchner and Stampfer could well understand that, and Sergeant-Major Minz, who had put Januschek on a charge for spreading rumours, stood by with a glum look on his face. Major Buchner said impatiently: "Where's Loose all this time?"

The adjutant, Lieutenant Loose, had been sent to phone the regimental adjutant to find out what truth there might

be in Januschek's talk. The fact was that the commander of the flak division, General Picker had flown out to report and certainly had not returned, though he seemed to have tried to. He had radioed: "Have attempted to fly in. Unfortunately not possible owing to strong enemy attacks."

As for Januschek, he had made much of it and let the ack-ack men on Pitomnik airfield tell him that during the night in question some twenty JU transport machines had landed without difficulty.

Lieutenant Loose returned at last. He confirmed all that Januschek had related, and moreover brought the contents of another radio message from General Pickert, which had been made known to the troops in an order of the day: "Richthofen forbidden further flight. Set up new 9th. Vengeance for Stalingrad!"

"*Mein Gott!*"

"Set up new 9th, what does that mean?"

"That was what made the Regimental Commander have a fit, so the adjutant told me," said Lieutenant Loose. "He radioed an answer that General Pickert won't keep as a souvenir."

"What sort of an answer?"

"9th Flak Division will continue to fight on the ruins of Stalingrad."

"*Mein Gott!* I still don't understand. It's as good as saying you're written off."

"*Jawohl*: written off."

"And the rat flies away!"

"Januschek, will you keep your mouth shut!"

"I think, Herr Major, a man who's written off—out of the grave so to speak—can say what he thinks."

"No, you've got to keep your mouth shut even in the grave! And now get out and don't let me hear of any more rumour-mongering! Understand?"

"*Jawohl*, Herr Major."

When Januschek and the sergeant-major had left, Major Buchner said to Loose and Stampfer: "Gentlemen, words fail me, I've never heard of such a thing! What it really means is that he's abandoned us, left us in the cart, virtually laid us in the grave. But the Commander's right: we're still here, and there's nothing else to do but fight on in the ruins."

"I still can't understand it, Herr Major," said Lieutenant

Loose. "A man in a leading position manœuvres us into this catastrophe, then gets into a plane and leaves us to go under! What state of mind is that, Herr Major?"

"*Mein Gott*—state of mind!" was all Buchner said.

. . . . .

Another group in defence-line "Violet" was Lundt's regiment. It consisted only of the regimental staff in a balka and the troops spread out farther forward, which had shrunk to battalion strength. Since their withdrawal from the western front, these troops had to all intents and purposes been led by the battalion adjutant, Lieutenant Lawkow.

But now Captain Henkel, recently flown in, was on his way to take over the battalion. By order of the Divisional Commander, and to save petrol, the détour to the ravine where Colonel Lundt and his staff lay was omitted, and the lorry with Captain Henkel drove direct to the front line, that is, to the point in the snowy waste where the temporary battalion leader, Lieutenant Lawkow, had set up his quarters.

Captain Henkel climbed out of the cabin of the lorry, followed by the driver. They stood on the white field under the stars, captain and driver, the latter holding the captain's two bags.

Henkel looked around.

"It's a goodish way, Herr Hauptmann." The driver led the way along a path trodden in the snow. The path sloped steeply into a narrow defile, some six feet deep, through snowdrifts, and suddenly ended at a half-open cave.

"Here it is, Herr Hauptmann."

"What! . . . But there ought to be a dugout!"

"Here it is, Herr Hauptmann," repeated the driver.

A pace farther, and Henkel still stood with his feet deep in snow under the cold twinkling stars. But now he was in a hole hacked in the wall, a fire glowed on the ground, and acrid smoke rose to his face. A hand stretched out and stirred the fire, so that in the flickering light Henkel saw the contents of the hole and its inhabitant. There was nothing but a bed of greatcoats and rags, the fire, a few cooking utensils and tins of conserves, and between fire and "bed" a box containing a telephone. Sitting cross-legged on the bed, beneath a driver's coat supported on sticks like a tent, sat a little fellow with pock-marked face.

He stood up and introduced himself as the deputy battalion-leader, Lieutenant Lawkow.

"Why are you sitting out here in the night? Where is your dugout, Herr Leutnant?" asked Captain Henkel when he had recovered from his first surprise.

"This is the battalion's battle position, Herr Hauptmann."

"But this is impossible! And where am I to be quartered?"

"We'll have to manage somehow—there's still some room here under the greatcoat."

"This is awful! What does it look like! Nothing here at all, absolutely nothing! And where are the other officers quartered?"

"I am the only officer in the battalion."

"*Mein Gott!*" said Henkel.

"Won't you sit down, Herr Hauptmann?"

"Sit down . . . ?" There was nothing else for it; Henkel crept under the "tent." Lawkow sat down again and drew his feet under him. "The best way to protect them," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"The best way to protect your limbs from frostbite is to keep them close to your body."

*Mein Gott*, what have I done? thought Henkel. There was I at Kharkhov in an army printing-plant, a steady job, too steady in fact, and no prospects of promotion. So I took a chance and got myself sent to Stalingrad where they'd promised me a battalion!

There he sat and now he had the battalion. But—*mein Gott!*—it wasn't true, it couldn't be true! Such a battalion H.Q. was unthinkable, unheard of! He must get to the bottom of this!

The first thing was to find out everything about the battalion's affairs.

"Where is the battalion at present, Lieutenant Lawkow?"

"Out there," answered Lawkow, and pointed over the defile. As he meant the steppe spreading beyond it he actually pointed to the sky. "Out there, in holes, two or three men to a hole, sometimes as many as five. We're flanking a road leading from Bolshaya Rossoshka. I'll have to go out again. The fellows haven't had anything to eat: I'll have to go and bleat something to them."

"What do you mean, bleat something?"

"Herr Hauptmann, as they've got absolutely nothing to eat they must be given some spiritual food; I've always done that."

Captain Henkel, in civilian life a law official and accustomed to a well-regulated mode of life as well as to punctilious and precise speech, was gradually becoming suspicious of this little lieutenant, pock-marked and dirty faced, sitting there with his legs tucked under him. He objected to such vague talk, especially, as he pointed out, in a military report and at the handing over of a battalion. Lieutenant Lawkow became military and Captain Henkel learned, this time very precisely, that the troops had had no hot food for three days and on this day not even cold food.

"Then the field-kitchen must be sent to them at once!" exclaimed Captain Henkel.

"We have no field-kitchen, Herr Hauptmann. And nothing to put in a field-kitchen. We've again received no rations from the regiment to-day."

"But that's frightful, an impossible state of affairs! I must ring up the regiment immediately!"

"*Jawohl*, Herr Hauptmann; I'll connect you at once."

Lawkow reached for the telephone standing by the bed, pulled it nearer, and put Captain Henkel through to the Regimental Commander, Colonel Lundt.

The conversation lasted a few minutes. Lieutenant Lawkow sat, thickly swathed in greatcoat, scarves and everything he had wrapped round himself, and watched the captain's face turn pale.

With nerveless hand Henkel laid the receiver down. He did not speak. He regarded Lawkow, sitting in the dull flickering light of the fire, as if he were seeing him for the first time. After a while he said: "He's a very nervous gentleman, our Colonel."

In the matter of rations Colonel Lundt had replied: "See what you can do. I can't help you there. Be guided by your Lieutenant; he knows what to do in an emergency." Further, he had ordered: "Above all, strengthen the position with anything you can find on the spot—there's not an hour to lose."

Captain Henkel resolved to inspect the front line at once. Before rising to be guided there by Lawkow he again returned to the question of food. "The Colonel said you

knew what to do in case of need. The feeding of the troops must be ensured—I mean it must be put on a proper basis."

"Herr Hauptmann, we have no such thing as a proper basis, in the matter of either food or ammunition. There's nothing here whatever."

"Then how have you been managing?"

"Just trusting to luck. Found some stuff that rear services chucked away when they were on the run. And when staffs were still moving east sometimes a horse came through, once a whole herd of cattle; so of course we lay in wait and caught a horse here, a cow there, tied them behind a truck, towed them along and slaughtered them. Of course that's just living from hand to mouth."

"But that's terrible!"

"Herr Hauptmann, so long as there was something to be found it wasn't so bad. But now there's nothing here at all. . . ."

Nothing at all to eat—but nobody can stand that!"

The lieutenant grinned, an unpleasant and incomprehensible grin in such a serious matter, and Captain Henkel said hurriedly: "Well, let's go and have a look at the positions."

They left the cave, and the captain's voice was again heard complaining of the darkness: ". . . can't even see your hand in front of your face!"

The driver dozing by the fire raised himself a little, thoughtfully shook his head, and muttered: "We shan't have him here long. Might as well bury him on the spot!"

Hours passed and the driver woke again. And again it was Henkel's complaining voice that he heard. Henkel and Lawkow had returned from their tour of inspection, and the driver heard the old refrain: "But it's impossible, I tell you! No dugout, no trench, that's not a line at all! It's impossible!" Then Henkel said: "I don't mind telling you, Mr. Lawkow. I wasn't so ambitious really. I didn't want to lead a battalion." After a while he added: "They told me in Kharkov that relief was coming for certain."

"I don't believe in relief any more," said Lawkow.

. . . . .

Every day someone shoots himself; every day someone goes mad. That could be said least of all of the front, of this thin ring daily getting thinner. At the front men sank

into utter apathy, but they died "normally"—of physical decline, of phthisis, of cold, of wounds. It was truest—and more so every day—of the interior of the ring, of staff bunkers, commands, ration and supply depots, workshop companies and rear services. Here men conferred, hammered out plans for break-out attempts or for flight; or they played cards, lost and won, traded and swapped, slept or failed to sleep, raged and blasphemed, prayed, sang hymns, discussed methods of suicide, raised revolvers and pointed them at their own temples. Out there, where the infantry lay with their heads against the side of the trench, or crouched behind walls of snow, where commanders and men lay together—that was the thin shell. There was the bottom of the caldron, where a single word could set the fermenting contents seething and turn men into horned, tailed, cloven-hoofed monsters trampling in blind fury on every living thing and breaking all the bonds of law and reason.

Such a word was: "Tanks!"

It was on the approach to Pitomnik, on the southern edge of the broad airfield, in that sector where, according to the plans of Army Staff, the 376th Infantry Division and the 29th (Motorised) Infantry Division should have gone into position. But both these divisions had been defeated in the region of Dmitrevka and Novo Alexeyevka, and no troops went into position here. Grey hordes rose out of the snow and swarmed from afar over the land; lorries, too, forced their way through the snowy waste. There was no stopping these hordes. They poured over the airfield and on through Pitomnik.

Was it the shout that rose from one of these mobs, or was it the sight of these exhausted figures, chased for days by tanks and hardly able to drag themselves along, that caused another mob to take up the cry?

"Tanks!" The shout burst from a terrified throat. And who could say who was the first to let out that cry? Who, when in the hot dust of the steppe a horde of mad dogs rush through village after village, can say which was the first mad dog?

"Tanks!" The cry ran through sprawling Pitomnik.

"Tanks!" The shout was taken up on the airfield. It leapt into the flight-control office, into the commandant's bunker; rushed through the tents of the dressing-station, through the stragglers' assembly-point, reached the throng

of vehicles on the road, raced round the horseshoe-shaped gully of the ration-depot with its bunkers of meat, vegetables, coffee and tea; then on to the road again; it jumped like an electric spark across the four kilometres to Pitomnik village.

The bone-saw shook in the hands of the surgeon. The wireless operator of flight-control threw off his earphones. The grave-digger dropped his spade. The town commandant roared for his driver. Scattered troops scattered anew. The wounded at the dressing-station raised themselves on their bunks. The supply officer at the ration-depot left bread, beef, coffee, tea. Who could reach a vehicle, rode; who had feet, ran. Thousands of unkempt, maddened, two-legged creatures rushed through Pitomnik and out on to the road. The direction? The same as it had been since the days of the advance. Therein lay the curse and the turning from triumph to death. The direction was Stalingrad.

It was a day that had brought snow from the heavy sky; now, with icy mist rising from the Volga, the day was ending. The runway was still free from ground mist; and two approaching JUs had radioed to flight-control. The two transport machines arrived over the airfield without fighter cover, circled, pierced through the patches of mist and prepared to land.

The medical orderlies began their work of carrying some forty seriously wounded men to the runway. And this, as it had been for the last few days at every landing, was the signal for the others. From the tents of the wounded, hundreds limped and stumbled as fast as they could to the airfield.

One JU had arrived; its propellers were still turning, but the machine had stopped. The cabin-door opened and unloading began. The second JU had already touched down and snow was shooting up behind the under-carriage. This was watched with interest by eyes brightening under head bandages, by seriously wounded men who could still observe. Thirty-eight lay there on stretchers, cardboard name-tabs on their chests, waiting to be flown out. And one of them was Captain Steiger.

Captain Steiger's left leg had been amputated just below the knee; it had not yet been possible to remove the shrapnel from his arm; his head wound had been found to be slight. He could hope to go to a hospital in Germany

and later get back to Bopfingen and there—though with an artificial leg—again take possession of his little kingdom of bellows, anvil, vice, hammers and borers. Lying there on the stretcher, cardboard tab on his chest, he thought of the way back, of Bopfingen, of his coppersmith's workshop, his old-fashioned cottage in the Untere Kochengasse, Kochengasse, his wife at home in the kitchen, a drink in the village inn after the day's work, a chat with a carter, with a farmer from Härdtfeld. . . . After what lay behind him, all this was so much happiness that he could not take it in; the snowfield, and on it the wonder-bird with broad wings and propellors that was to give him back this lovely, simple, natural life, seemed like a phantom. He could not believe it—it contradicted the stern law in the power of which for so many days he had known himself to be.

Steiger was perhaps the only one who with sane eyes saw it all, as much as two eyes could compass of the shapeless, many-footed stampede, and who, while his chest was being trampled on and the ribs rammed into his lung, with bloody foam on his lips uttered the words "*Ja und Amen!*"

For days the flak artillery had had the order to fire on the mob if necessary. Now the guns were being cranked down to ground fighting range, but they were not fired. In the snow were hundreds of shuffling feet, wrapped in rags, blankets, canvas. The faster ones broke through the crowd of lame men and came panting along with wide, glittering eyes, gaping mouths and distended nostrils. Those overrun and trampled down lay silent with their faces in the snow; those that were too slow lagged behind and filled the air with their cries.

Burst sacks of beans, chocolate, bread; bottles of schnaps trampled to splinters; among them the faces of men knocked down. Those rose no more. Kicked down again by felt-draped, shapeless feet, they became one mass and formed a bridge to the cabin door and into the interior of the wonder-bird. The bridge grew so high that the "strong," the "victors," had to bend down to get inside. The guards, too, were maddened by the clamorous shouts and the atmosphere of death; they used their rifle butts to fight their way to the entrance and, once there, threw their rifles away and themselves slipped inside the plane. Wounded men, stretcher-bearers, soldiers, officers—all pushed and shoved and forced their way in. Yet there

was accommodation for only twenty, and the food was only half unloaded. The pilot had no choice; there was no help for it, he had no time, the fog was rising. He climbed into his seat. Engine and propeller roared. Snow shot up as the plane moved off and the crowd fell back with a howl. The cabin door was open; arms, legs, bodies hung out. Twice the overloaded machine struck the ground, then rose ponderously into the air.

When the second JU started, it happened. As the machine began to roar, the mob fell back among the seriously wounded men on the stretchers. Some of these were killed; and one of them was Steiger. He did not die immediately; he raised his head once again. He saw the great bird move away, shaking off dark bundles of humanity; and he saw the hordes of the damned that remained behind.

And the dying Steiger asked and answered himself: "Have I set fire to a house? . . . No! Have I stolen a farmer's cow from the shed? . . . No! Did I want the Volga? . . . No, no, no! But others wanted it. And houses had been set on fire, cows stolen, widows robbed of bread. And women and children have been carried off—my eyes have seen it! Captain Steiger, coppersmith Steiger, you took part in it! To the anvil, to the bellows, to the cottage in the Untere Kochengasse—no road leads back there now. You are dying . . . not for Bopfingen, not for Härdtfeld, not for Germany, but for a bit of Kalmuk earth. There lies the guilt!"

One more look out of dying eyes. A broad white field, but now it had become narrow. With the mass of howling, desperate figures staggering weakly towards the east it was a white-hot smelting pan with floating grey bubbles of scum. A smelting pan—and the scum would be skimmed off and thrown on the dunghill.

"And the crooked shall be made straight. *Ja und Amen!*"

So died Captain Steiger.

. . . . .

It was growing dark over Pitomnik. In the centre was the broad airfield, surrounded by a wall of bunkers. Parked in rows were tanks, lorries, cars, tractors—hundreds stretching out in all directions. Without fuel, lifeless, a thick mantle of snow on tarpaulins, coachwork and armour, the vehicles stood in long rows like the streets of a deserted

town. And indeed they were deserted and abandoned. A few kilometres to the south was Pitomnik village, also deserted and abandoned. Only a few huts were left in this much bombed place, and life had long crept into underground dugouts. Open doors swung in the wind. Tattered canvas fluttered on the tents of the wounded. There were notices on doors and dugout walls: Local Command — Deutsche Feldpost — Armoury — De-lousing Station—Ration Depot—Stragglers' Assembly Point. But not a soul was in sight. The wild hordes had rushed by—on cars, horse-carts, sledges; men falling off and hobbling along on foot only to be knocked down by following vehicles when those assembled at the ration depot joined the stampede from there. Men scattered, run over, thrown under the hoofs of horses galloping beneath the whip; men left lying in the snow and struggling up again—so the wild mob had swept by, to the east, from the airfield to Pitomnik village, to Halt 44 and—those that got so far—to Gumrak, to Stalingradski, to Stalingrad.

The Trumpets of Jericho! No shell, no tank—a cry from a terrified human throat, caught by a thousand ears and carried on: that was what had blown down the walls. Pitomnik was deserted. Only the icy breath of the Volga now drifted over the huge cemetery of vehicles, and past ruins, walls, dugouts and bunkers. A listener into the mist might have caught the whimpering of a dying man; had he pursued the sound, he might have heard a softly-spoken question, a sobbing answer. He might have seen in the mist a kneeling figure bent over an outstretched human form; he might have seen the gleam of a silver chain dangling from the tunic, and at the end of the chain a crucifix.

"No, I don't want to . . . just for once I'd like to. . . ."

"You'd like to—what, just for once, my lad?"

"Eight years Hitlerjugend, then Arbeitsdienst, then Landdienst, then the army . . . just for once, padre, to live without kit inspection, without having to fall in . . . just to be alone. . . . No, no, I don't want to. . . ."

"Neither does a child want to fall asleep, my good lad. But when the mother lays her hand over the eyes, they close of their own accord."

The dying man gasped; his head fell back.

"Our Father, which art in Heaven. . . ."

And fingers stretch out and close the eyelids, draw the

paybook from the breast pocket, break off the lower half of the perforated identity disc. Mechanically, fingers perform a task done a thousand times before.

Lips murmur: "Lord, give him eternal rest. And the eternal light be upon him."

The Chaplain went slowly on. He left behind him the deserted village, the wrecked vehicles, the sledges flung aside by lorries, and the dying horses. He followed the road that sloped down into a ravine and along the bottom of it; followed in the direction of Gumrak the traces of the nightmare of internal-combustion engines, horse carts, and shuffling human feet.

Chaplain Kalser was on the way from Pitomnik to Stalingrad. Once he had been a vicar in the Corveyer Land, at Höxter-on-the-Weser. He came of a mining family from the coal region of Westphalia. When the choice had remained between concentration camp and army chaplain he had chosen the army.

"I am the Chaplain of the 376th Infantry Division." Thus he would introduce himself as he knelt by a form lying on the road.

The 376th Infantry Division, mauled fifty-six days before on the other side of the Don, had been re-formed by its commander and in the Kazatchi Hills had again been routed; all that remained of it were the leaderless groups retreating from the west. The Chaplain had not driven off with the divisional staff. He had remained with the dying, and with his protestant colleague, Martin Koog, and his verger, Hans Schellenburg, he had followed these groups, the three of them taking turns to pull the luggage along on a sledge. Now these groups, too, without visible cause, were scattered to the four winds; there was no Koog, no Schellenburg, no sledge. He went on his way alone.

He closed the eyelids of Protestants, Catholics, Russians. That night they were not men torn by shells and grenades; they were men struck down, run over, crushed by heavy 8-tonners, trampled under hoofs; wounded men who had fled their tents to fall and die in the snow.

The weather changed. Snow had fallen during the day; the evening had been misty; now the temperature dropped and from the tall sky a murderous cold descended.

Chaplain Kalser bent over the next man. From the look that greeted the priest in him he recognised the catholic; he drew out the little wallet with OI stitched on it. It

contained a wad that had already wiped the brows of hundreds, and the thumb-sized capsule of Oleum Infirmorum almost congealed with cold.

"Will you have the last sacrament?"

"*Ja!*" said the eyes shining in the mist. The hand reaching for the wallet groped in the air. Under the blessing, under the gentle hand laid on the brow, the gasps of the dying man grew weaker. Perhaps he saw once again the eternal light of his village church, felt the air of his native heath, saw a vision of his mother, his wife, at home. Widened eyes. The last throes. The end.

"Padre, stay with me!" begged the next. "Please take this letter! Please write to my wife!" others entreated. Nearly all asked to be taken away. Many begged for a cigarette; many wanted bread.

Dying men wanting to smoke a cigarette! Dying men asking, not for consecrated bread, but for a piece of ordinary black bread! The Chaplain had no cigarettes. He still had five pieces of consecrated bread, and with these he must ease the passing of he knew not how many dying men. The holy oil he must keep deep in his trousers pocket, lest it freeze; and at least one hand, the right, he must keep warm to lay on, to bless, to give the last sacrament.

A face in the snow; the snow white, the face yellow.

"What's your name, my lad?"

"Hollwitz."

"What can I do for you? I am the Chaplain of the 376th."

"I'd like a cigarette, that's all."

Von Hollwitz recognised the Chaplain; and Kalser recognised Staff Captain von Hollwitz, who had taken over the alarm company in Vertyatchi. And—slowly, painfully it struggled out of the sick breast—he learned his story. The wounded von Hollwitz had been brought to Pitomnik airfield to be flown out. One howling night, when snow was driving into the tent and the wounded, with no doctor or medical orderly there, were silently dying one after another, he had got up, found the doctors' bunker, and demanded that as many wounded as possible be moved from the tents to the bunkers, to keep them alive till they were flown out. The only result was that the chief staff-M.O. said to him: "Show me your evacuation warrant, Herr Hauptmann—it will have to be checked

again." He had not got it back, and with that he was doomed.

And now—a night of snow; a bitter sky; a chaplain!

A common peasant priest—von Hollwitz well remembered the last time he had seen him, when he, Hollwitz, was burning his letters. *Mein Gott!* The whole wretchedness of it gripped young Hollwitz. He lost control; he sobbed; red foam broke out on his lips. The arm under the greatcoat, and one side of his chest, were in a bandage. Like all those who could still walk he had fled from the hospital tent. On the road he had signalled, but in vain. Nothing had stopped. He had stood in the way of a vehicle to force it to stop, and it had struck him down; and there he had lain.

Twenty years old. In his pocket, in the last letter he had received from his father, the only one he had not burned, he had read: " . . . yesterday at the shooting-box, a fourteen-pointer—I had him right in front of my barrel! But, no, I'm saving him till you come back; he's for you. . . ."

But now the hand of the " common priest " was a human touch, a hand in the last extremity. The man struggling against death was quieter now; he only whimpered softly. Presently Chaplain Kalser gently closed the boy's eyelids, folded the hands on the breast, broke off half the identity disc and put it in his pocket.

The way was long. The earth white, the sky above grey. In the snow the dead, the dying, the living. On the road snowed-up vehicles and cursing drivers; men shovelling snow with steel helmets, with hands, clearing a way; sweating brows, arms paralysed from cranking frozen engines that would not start. On the roadside wrecked sledges, toppled wagons, broken wheels, lone horses wearily setting hoof before hoof, turning off, vanishing into the night.

Groups of limping forms, staggering onward.

" Where to, lads? "

" Stalingrad."

" Whatever do you want in Stalingrad."

Puzzled looks, glittering eyes, idiotic laughter. Thickly wrapped feet grinding in the snow. At the roadside a dark triangle reared up on its forelegs and collapsed; a dying horse.

Stalingrad! What else? What else could there be in

that white windy chaos? Grinding snow. Trembling knees, weary feet; painfully they drag the load of exhausted bodies. Noses white with frostbite. Ears dropping off. Freezing tears. Whimpering.

"Where to?"

"Stalingrad."

"What's wrong, my lad?"

"It's my heart, I must sit down."

"Yes, sit down, I'll stay with you."

"My heart . . . my feet too . . . and that swine Wedderkop!"

"Who's Wedderkop?"

Lieutenant Wedderkop—in Pitomnik he had fled with a lorry to Stalingrad, leaving driver and driver's mate behind.

"And what's your name?"

"Kalbach, Herr Pfarrer."

"Feel better?"

"Worse—I'll have to lie down."

"Lie down—there, I'll put your pack under your head. Give me the blanket, so you'll be covered. I'll stay with you. Where do you come from?"

"Urbach, in Thüringia. . . ." In a changed, far-away voice he went on: "Martha, you mustn't lift these heavy weights now. . . . Well, sir, you'll have to help with the threshing, that's all—Martha can't work now and I can't do it either in this cold. . . . No, it's just will-power keeps me going, else I'd collapse. . . . 24 cwt. of rye and 3 cwt. of oats to deliver, that's a lot and 25 of hay and 90 of potatoes. . . ."

The delirious voice grew softer: "To-morrow I'll thresh the last of the corn, then deliver the 25 . . . why to Stalingrad? . . . all right then, if you'll only leave me in peace. . . . If only this dreadful war would end. . . . They're loading straw at the station again—but we won't give any up, d'you hear, Martha. . . . Martha, d'you remember. . . ."

A snowflake settled on Kalbach's nose, another on his lips; they lay as they had fallen. Once more half an identity disc was broken off and went into the Chaplain's coat-pocket.

Protestants, catholics, heathens—to all he gave his blessing. Who wanted the last sacrament—to him he gave it. Who wanted to die without it—to him he made no rebuke. Words had become cheap, had lost their power.

He held the hands of the trembling, laid his finger-tips on the brow of the dying, a mother's kiss on the brow of those who had passed over. With every dying man he died, with every suffering soul he felt his own guilt grow

The Wehrmacht Chaplain of the 376th, vicar of Höxter, son of a miner from the Oberhausen coal-face, was not learned in the Scriptures; but one sign was within him and he saw it rise out of the snow and grow up to the sky. That it was a sign, and that in other geographical and spiritual zones of humanity other signs, such as TAO, JUSTICE, REASON, are set in the same place, was no concern of his, for he was a simple son of his Church.

This sign the priest saw rising from the snow and towering to the sky. There it was—come again, challenging and pointing the way, making order out of chaos, mending what was broken, making the crooked straight. The priest walked through the snow towards the sign and he blessed no more. His fingers were frozen and the hand clutching the capsule of holy oil was like hard wood. And it was not only to the icy wind blowing from the east that he bowed his head.

He wandered over apocalyptic land.

. . . . .

General Vennekohl had been right. "'Violet' can't be done at all. I tip 'Sunflower,'" he had said.

And "Violet" could no longer be "done." This defence line had shown a big gap. The remnants of the beaten 376th and the 29th (Motorised) Infantry Divisions —this horde of weaponless and dying men had fled through Pitomnik and beyond without stopping; those from still farther west, the 3rd (Motorised) Infantry Division from the "nose" of Marinovka, had already perished in blizzard and panic and under the wheels of their own vehicles. The sector allotted to this Division remained unoccupied. Troops picked up and sent forward could no longer stop up the gap. The adjacent troops had had to withdraw, as had also Keil's group, Vilshofen's group and Lundt's regiment.

If now, despite orders to the contrary, the line fell back, Pitomnik was to be held, at least for three days until the bunkers of the supply-depot there could be evacuated. To

the units that now had to build up a bridgehead in the flood of collapsing and weakening troops in the wide bend round the airfield and village of Pitomnik belonged Vilshofen's and Keil's groups and Lundt's and Schwandt's regiments.

A few kilometres beyond and west of the railway, in the deep Tulevoi ravine, sat in one bunker the chief of corps staff, Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht, and in another the artillery commander, General Vennekohl. The plans and calculations they were hatching were those of the intended new defence line to cover the Pitomnik bridgehead. This line, not yet supplied and not yet built up, was to be held as long as possible.

At the same hour—it was the night when the airfield and village were abandoned in panic—Major-General Gönnern sat in a neighbouring balka between the snow-covered slopes of the Tulevoi ravine. Opposite him sat the newly arrived Lieutenant-General Damme, commander of the division that had fled from Kletskaya across the Don and through Vertyatchi, and whose next bloody étape had been the region of Dmitrevka and the territory by the Kazatchi Hills—the one called by the troops the drowned division, the lost division, the accursed division, and that now really was drowned, lost, accursed, and had ceased to exist.

Drowned, lost, accursed. The men applied these words to the commander too, and now he looked it, his face sagging, the pale blue eyes like those of a dead fish.

"There's still something left," he replied to Gönnern's inquiry about the state of his division. "Yes, still something, mixed up with a crowd from the 29th and some rear services. Rolled over—yes, it's a wonder we got so far." (Only Damme, the gentlemen of his staff, and part of the staff company, had got so far.) "Yes, Steinle, Colonel Steinle's out there getting together what can be got together. Maybe a combat group'll come out of it. . . Hurry up and unpack! No, not that one—there in the brown bag the cigars must be!" he snapped at his batman. Now for the first time he looked around the bunker. "Doesn't seem too bad here. Wooden walls, built-in sleeping-bunks, even curtains. And pictures on the walls, naked girls, that's not so dusty!"

"The field gendarmerie lived here before," said Gönnern. As a married man with three grown-up

daughters he did not desire the credit for walls decorated with nude photos and pictures from illustrated papers.

"I can well believe it, Gönnern," said Damme.

The batman had found the cigars. He put a box in front of Damme, who offered a cigar to Gönnern and took one himself.

"Yes, Gönnern, in a word—a bloody mess! Everything's gone to pot. Kletskaya—*mein Gott!*" (He said that as if Kletskaya had been an episode in another life.) "And now the Kazatchi Hills—two hours of bombardment made a shambles of that! Couldn't be held!"

Another puff at his cigar. "Yeah, Hube"—General Hube, commander of a panzer unit, had been Damme's neighbour at Dmitrevka—"What a lot of big talk there was from Hube! And it was all in front of his eyes—he saw how we were melting away. Flew out to report to the Führer. He might have told him how senseless it all is here—sheer suicide. Oh, yes, he's back. We've got to see it through—that's all he brought back with him. He didn't bring tanks or men, only fine words! Had a weapon-pit dug for himself at Dubininski! 'For defence at close-quarters! So far and no farther!' he announced in his grand manner. And what happened? Flown out again and not coming back this time. And here we are sitting in the shit!"

"So Hube flew out too, did he?"

"Who else did, then?"

"Pickert flew out a few days ago." Gönnern related how he had returned, circled over the airfield, radioed that he unfortunately could not land, and flown off again.

"So he's had no luck with Richthofen so far, and I suppose he's flown back to try some more wheedling."

"It put the flak division into a hell of a state. Talk about bewilderment, depression—they were furious!"

"I can imagine it."

"And now Bär's back."

"Did he fly out too?"

"Yes, to report to the Führer."

"What's he brought back with him?"

"Definite agreement, they say, in the matter of reinforcements. The Reichsmarschall himself wants to take the matter in hand."

"Yeah, he ought to come out here and have a look at the mess on Pitomnik airfield!"

"If he'd only have a look at Schachty and Mariupol airports!"

"What! Schachty? Mariupol? I thought the airports were Morosovski and Salsk!"

"They were once, Damme. Nobody knows exactly how the front runs now."

"Pickert jumped off at the right moment. But we're in the trap. Everything's breaking down here. To hold on is utter madness! I must say it, Gönnern: in this situation there's nothing for it but to capitulate."

"There's no such thing—Bär brought that back too. The Führer's supposed to have ordered drastic measures. There's no such thing as capitulation, he said. We've got to take an example from him."

"What does that mean, Gönnern?"

"Maybe that I'll have to drink water like him. Well, I've come to that already, and the cigars are running out. *Mein Gott*, he can't mean to stretch us all out in the snow!"

"Talking of water, I've still got a bottle of cognac." In fact Gönnern had several bottles; but as things were he was being careful with it and generally used this beverage as a sleeping-draught. Now, however, he sent for the opened bottle and two glasses. But before he had filled the glasses his 1a entered with his adjutant and the supplies officer.

"Pitomnik has fallen, Herr General!"

"What! How—how is it possible?"

The 1a pushed forward the supplies officer. The latter seemed more dead than alive and looked as if he had been pulled out of the snow—greatcoat open, buttons missing, pockets torn, face scratched.

"A panzer assault!" Incoherent phrases: "Tanks—at the airfield—everywhere masses of vehicles—at Halt Point 44 lorries—you can't imagine it, Herr General—fleeing troops—indescribable scenes. . . ." But details—from which side, in what strength the attack, what German units involved—the captain could not give.

The telephone buzzed. The 1a lifted the receiver. "Troops to be withdrawn from the western front and put on the march to the south. The question of pulling out Vilshofen's group from the line held by the Division is under consideration." The 1a passed it on to his commanding officer.

Gönnern spluttered: "Out of the question! The front's

not holding as it is! Pull out Vilshofen—but where is Vilshofen, if Pitomnik . . . ?" Suddenly it occurred to him that Vilshofen's group stood far west of Pitomnik! Gönnern drummed his fist on the table, stared at the supplies officer: "Have you seen any tanks, Captain Wenzel?"

"No, Herr General."

"Has any attempt been made to communicate with Vilshofen?" Gönnern asked his Ia.

"Not up to now, Herr General."

"Ring him up, ring him up!"

Vilshofen's group answered as usual. It stood as before —as for the last ten days—defending and holding off. True, at this time it was engaged in hard fighting against tanks and infantry; but its commander knew nothing of a break-through in the rear. Moreover—the telephone wire to Vilshofen ran through Pitomnik.

"What's going on—the greatest *Schweinerei* in this swine of a war! What's going on, Captain Wenzel? Have you brought any supplies with you?"

"No, Herr General."

"Why not, Sir? I'd like to know, if you please!"

"The supply-depot has been . . . has been . . ."

"Has been what?"

"Has been liquidated, Herr General."

Corps H.Q. rang again: "The Commanding General asks what sort of *Schweinerei* is going on in the area of the Division and requires an immediate answer."

"Will be ascertained at once and, as soon as clarification obtained, reported," barked Gönnern to his Ia, who passed it on.

Lieutenant-General Damme had meanwhile helped himself from the bottle of cognac. He shook his head and regarded them all, one after the other.

"It started just like this at Novo Alexeyevka. The whole army's ripe for the madhouse!"

. . . . . .

At the same hour Battalion-Leader Lieutenant Lawkow was trudging through the snow-swept night. Weary, aching all over, head bent forward as if a heavy load lay on his shoulders, greatcoat heavy with hard, icy snow, he was scarcely aware of his progress. Yet he strode resolutely over the white snowfield towards the ravine in

which he knew were Colonel Lundt and the regimental staff.

Captain Henkel had stuck it out with the battalion only till the next morning. When the attack had started and Stalin's organ-crescendo blared out over battalion staff in the ravine, he had crawled into the farthest corner of the hole. That would not have mattered so much—Lawkow had done the same. But Henkel was lifeless, incapable of speech or thought, incapable of issuing orders. When the "Urra!" of storming Russians rang out he had sprung up and run and was seen no more; and Lawkow had continued to lead the battalion.

Lawkow strode through the night of driving snow, gun-flashes and exploding grenades. His brain numbed, he did not want to know, did not want to think what it was or how many there were moving behind him. In his mind there were many. The battalion numbered a thousand men when it was pulled out of the northern bolt position; it still numbered four hundred when Captain Henkel should have taken over. No, he preferred not to think; yet despite his leaden fatigue, pictures—faces—raced by, voices sounded. But they were faces and voices of yesterday which he knew no longer existed.

Lieutenant Lawkow reached the ravine. He trudged along it and shuffled down a slope, and there was trudging and shuffling behind him. He stood before a hole in the ground, the entrance to the bunker of the commander of his regiment. And he thought nothing, but something made him act and command as if he were on the drill-square at Arys, in East Prussia.

"Fall in!"

The tone from a forgotten past made the same Lawkow who had uttered it straighten to attention. The same tone from a forgotten past jerked the men and made them soldiers again; the same tone set up a ghostly battalion in line before the sentry posted in front of the commander's bunker.

Lieutenant Lawkow strode past the sentry. In three paces he crossed the ante-room of the bunker and entered a dugout behind some boards. There sat the Regimental Commander in the light of his lamp.

The Regimental Commander looked up, gripped the table-edge with both hands, stared at the little lieutenant, his battalion leader who should have been in the main

fighting line and who now stood before him in ice-crusted greatcoat.

Again something made Lawkow speak:

"Here I am, God help me!"

Lawkow stood there, straight as a post. Colonel Lundt sprang up, white as chalk, and his voice trembled: "What's the matter, Lawkow? Where's your battalion?"

Lieutenant Lawkow answered: "The battalion is outside. I must inform you, Herr Oberst, that the battalion now consists of four men."

. . . . . .

At the same hour, in his "furnished mouse-trap" which had been fitted up that day, sat Colonel Carras. From Army H.Q. in a ravine near Stalingradski he had been sent to Stalingrad, where he had quartered himself at the regimental battle position in the ruins of a big store. Disturbed by the incessant coming and going in his quarters, and oppressed by the cellar air, he had taken a sort of billet next to the artillery observation-post at the top of the tall ruin, whence by day he had a wide panorama of wrecked Stalingrad, the frozen Volga and the broad flat land on the other bank. A chair pulled out of the rubble, a shelf for ash-tray, and a few utensils comprised the "furniture"; the window-holes were stopped up with wood and rags; and there he sat in greatcoat and fur boots with a writing-tablet on his knees. In brief notes he was putting down his first impressions of the Stalingrad area.

"Obvious: complete breakdown of supply services. Shortage of everything. Rapid decline in fighting power of troops—roaming around, lack of discipline, wild rumour-mongering. Confusion among staffs; dangerous nervousness everywhere. Here as elsewhere hope of help from outside a sign of declining faith in own strength. . . ."

These were notes for a written—or rather for a verbal—report to or in the OKH*; it must not differ too much from the official form, even though Carras had his own and far-reaching thoughts on the matter. He had been at Pitomnik, at Gumrak, at the northern bolt position, and on the southern front; and though he had been in the ring but a few days he had spoken with dozens of officers, commandants, chiefs of staff, even with two corps commanders—and for all his robust spirit he was shaken. Everyone outside the ring—even a captain whom he had

* Oberkommando des Heeres.

met a week ago in the Munich-Berlin sleeping car, to say nothing of the officers in the OKH—knew more about the situation of the beleagured than they themselves. The OKH had no further illusions about the fate of the 6th Army. If they mentioned the figure of nearly 300,000 fighting men and made a pretence of optimism, it was only because that was officially required. Everyone there knew that the figure meant nothing—knew that man cannot sin with impunity, even in the military sense; everyone knew that on such a scale the catastrophe would be tremendous. But those whom it most concerned, personally concerned, men of sober consideration, judgment and resolution (for one must assume that of army leaders) had no idea. To find nervousness, bewilderment, despair—that was understandable and only natural as things were. But the swing of the pendulum to the other side—to find commanders of regiments, of divisions, of whole army corps, forty and fifty-year-olds of twenty and thirty years' service, possessed of a child-like faith and a positively mystic trust in the "Führer's promise"—that was staggering! These were colonels and generals, every one of whom could lay his hands on thousands and ten thousands of men. They talked of break-out attempts and went so far (they had done it for operation "Thunderclap") as to issue orders to blow up any arms and ammunition that could not be taken on the "trip"—only to cancel the whole thing next day and find themselves still poorer, still further deprived of the most essential things. Nonetheless, they at once began planning new operations, and when these could not be carried out, or were forbidden from outside, they said: "All right! We stay where we are and they'll hammer us out from outside." Who was to hammer them out? The Japanese? As for Manstein and the beaten Don group, they had not got over the defeat of Hooth and the collapse of the Don front True, for the 6th Army belonging to it there were many fine words; but nobody gave a cent for this group now.

Carras had met one man, the commanding general in one of the ravines by Gumrak, who saw clearly enough to realise that the army in their army group was already written off. This general, a white-haired gentleman, of an old Prussian army family, had his finger on the patient's wrist and registered with clear eyes the jumps of the fever thermometer. No wonder his nerves trembled and anxiety

shook him. For this was an advanced paralysis of the whole organism, of which he with his army corps and ali his men were a part, of which he himself was a cell; and nothing could hide from him that all the symptoms pointed to the early death of the patient.

One such man Carras had found; perhaps there were others. But taken all in all—a bundle of flickering hopes, dimmed judgment, paralysed power of decision. Truly a case for a psychiatrist! Here stretched out on the table was a subject for the observation of mass psychosis such as history had never before produced. Notes could have been taken here for a thesis on the decline in physical powers, the weakening of mental, moral and physical resistance; on the phenomena of the new "cauldron disease" leading to mass death. But Carras was not sent there for that; it was not his job; neither OKH nor Führer's Headquarters wished to know anything about it; he need make no observations. But—*mein Gott!*—not only the commanding general at Gumrak, the front-line flak-commander, and the wounded men on Pitomnik air-field, but he himself. Colonel Carras, was caught up in the vortex by skin and hair and teeth! He, too, was a cell in the twitching organism stretched out on the observation table!

At the same hour Radio-Lieutenant Stetten sat decoding and transmitting messages at the snow-swept radio-point at Gumrak. One message to Zeitzler, Chief of Staff at the OKH, ran: "We are approaching a catastrophe here. Almost without supplies. Ammunition and petrol nearly finished. Question is, what does the Führer say to this?"

Incoming messages read: "Appreciation to commanders and men for great defensive success. I look forward to recommendations for distinctions. Von Manstein." "My thanks and admiration to 2nd Grenadier Regiment 134. Von Manstein." (To whom were thanks and admiration to be expressed? The 2nd Grenadier Regiment no longer existed, except for six men.) "To Army Group Vilshofen my thanks and appreciation. Colonel Vilshofen is promoted Major-General w.e.f. 1/1/43. Von Manstein."

At the same hour the wheels of a lorry skidded on a high, icy bit of road. It was between the flying-school and the first houses of Stalingrad. The driver, an officer unused to lorries, jammed on the foot-brake. The lorry

spun round, skidded across the road, rolled down the embankment and overturned. By the battered wreck, among the pieces and the rations collected at Pitomnik, sat Lieutenant Wedderkop. He might have sat there till he was frozen; or he might have been picked up by the field gendarmerie and delivered to the local commander But he was picked up by another searcher, a Sergeant-Major Lachmann, who was hunting for booty. Lachmann, noting the figure sitting upright between the wrecked lorry and the scattered rations, paused and carefully observed the staring blue eyes. After exchanging a few words with this figure, he knew what he had before him!

"The axle's bust, I hope," said Wedderkop in a clear voice and without batting an eyelid

"Yes, Herr Leutnant, it looks like it."

"Well, fighting spirit—that's the important thing, we've still got that."

"We've still got that, even if the axle's gone."

"Fighting spirit, oneness with nature, to become a part of nature oneself—that's the most important thing in this profession. What d'you think of the general situation?"

"Bit cloudy," said Lachmann. "But still, I see a silver lining," and he counted up what he saw. "Peas, chocolate, bread, beef. And I expect there's some schnaps in there, isn't there?"

"Yes a whole day's rations for the group."

"Lovely! But let's get up. It's cold sitting down."

"Yes, it is rather."

The case was clear to Lachmann: crashed with all the rations into the ditch; slight concussion. But what to do with him? Not leave him there: that might attract others to this rich wreck. He helped Wedderkop to his feet. The limbs were whole. Only the head had suffered. But all the same, what a well-disciplined fellow! Lachmann loaded him up like a pack-mule, and took as much as he could carry himself. Then he led him on a détour, dodging sentries, into Stalingrad, through ruins and barbed wire, across yards, through bombed houses, and finally down steps into a bunker. Thus Wedderkop came into a hiding-place of the ever-growing band of parasites, a cave of the "Stalingrad Underworld."

. . . . .

At the same hour sledges were crunching over the broad Russian hinterland in long, seemingly endless columns

Heavily-laden lorries were driving the same way. Beyond Stalingrad, on the flat meadows, ammunition was piling up by the batteries of artillery. Across the frozen Volga went a long line of marching troops: Red Army men in short fur coats, fur caps, gauntlets and thick lambskin felt boots; infantrymen with machine-pistols; artillery, rocket-guns, tanks. This time the direction was Voroponove. Up to now the blows had fallen from the north-west, from the west, and from the south. and German divisions had been chased across the broad white field. The ring had shrunk. Now it just covered the town with a loop like an ugly sack in the bend of the Volga.

This sack was now to be pierced from the south-west in the main direction of Voroponovo.

THE RAILWAY LOOP OFFERED THE LAST line of resistance.

The iron band ran from the bank of the Volga through the centre of the town and led via Gorodishtche and Gumrak some fifteen kilometres into the steppe, then turned south and ran back to the Volga via Voroponovo and Petchanka. This railway approximately marked the wall of frozen clay, débris and snow, behind which, crammed into a narrow space, were the defenders—tattered, exhausted, hollow-eyed soldiers. Behind this wall the 6th Army was to meet its doom.

To the north, the colonies of bunkers hidden in ravines and gullies round Gorodishtche and Gumrak had been "frozen in" since the days of the German advance to the Volga; and even now they remained almost untouched. There was the Tulevoi ravine—in the hot autumn days and into November it had swallowed waves of tanks and storming infantry and had acquired the name "Death Valley." Here were grave after grave and cross after cross —some bearing the numbers of long-vanished regiments—marking the death-plots of the great Stalingrad military cemeteries There were the Gorodishtche casualty clearing-station and the Gumrak military hospital; these were nothing but collecting points for the growing steppe cemeteries at their doors. There were artillery regiments that still had horses and could still feed them, having

foraged far in the summer and autumn days. There were gunners, signallers, supply units or the remaining staffs of those units, and corps staffs; these were also supplied with food, having foraged and having been able to fall back on their stocks. These units, in their lonely gullies, were so well hidden in their bunkers that not only were they invisible to the enemy, but even the hollow-eyed wretches limping by on the road scarcely saw them.

Here was the bunker village of the 71st Infantry Division, named, after its commander, General von Hartmann, "Hartmannsdorf." This, with its wooden winter bunkers (already built in the autumn) with fittings, lights, furniture (including Timoshenko's desk, it was said) brought out from the ruins of Stalingrad houses, and with its own poultry farm and dairy, had recently been taken over by the Commander-in-Chief and his staff.

That was the north, as yet untouched by the collapses on the front. Here on this territory it happened that an intelligence officer, out for a stroll, had run into a newly-moved line of infantry and met a captain of his acquaintance. He had pulled out a sample of oats that happened to be in his pocket and seen the captain grab at it and devour, not a few grains, but a whole handful. Then for the first time he realised what he had not known before: that his bunker was surrounded by a wave of hunger.

It happened that the commander of an artillery detachment by Hill 107 had seen a group of soldiers coming up out of a gully—they seemed to him to have risen out of graves and swamps. To his question, "Where to?" he had received the answer, "Stalingrad"; and to his question, "Where are you from?" the answers, "Karpovka," "Baburkin," "Sapadnovka," "Rossoshka." Only then did he realise that the entire front around had collapsed.

It happened that a radio-lieutenant near Gumrak heard knocking at his door in the night and did not open. The next morning he had to call for help from outside to remove the frozen corpses of three soldiers lying in the snow and blocking his door. And these three were but the first of a never-ending stream of starving men who dragged themselves to the bunker doors and the lanes of the bunker villages and whose bodies were no longer removed.

In a ravine by Gumrak the commanding general mentioned by Carras had his quarters. Descendant of a famous cavalry leader and nobleman of the time of Friedrich II, he was a white-haired gentleman of thirty years' service. The first time he saw a column of exhausted soldiers on the Gumrak-Gorodishtche road he stopped, wide-eyed, while the sorry parade of tattered, limping, apathetic creatures, some on sticks, passed by, not one raising his head or his eyes to the general. Returning to his bunker the commanding general rang up dressing-stations and casualty clearing-stations; he got himself put through to army general staff, the chief medical officer, the chief of staff, the commander-in-chief. He raised the alarm, but it was an impotent protest and he knew it. From the beginning of the encirclement he had urged the necessity of putting an end to an impossible situation and making an organised break-through to the west. He had seen the rising toll of death; he knew that it had been going on for fifty-seven days now; he knew that the dressing-stations and casualty clearing-stations were unable to cope with the masses of sick and dying men; he knew that the march of death had now reached his area.

That was the north, now close to the defence ring. This territory of well-concealed bunkers and well-trodden roads through the snow could no longer escape the invasion of the limping and dying; this once central and now northern part of the ring could no longer escape the direct assault of enemy weapons.

The sack was torn open from the south. Seven days had passed since the offer of capitulation terms by the Soviet High Command. Seven days the pressure from west and south-west had continued. The ring of defenders had shown breaches, had drawn closer together and closed again; again and again it was torn open, its units rolled farther back, from the west towards Pitomnik and the railway, and from the south also towards the railway.

Pitomnik had been abandoned in panic. By order of the High Command troops were sent back to collect stores and bring them out. It was already nearly eleven o'clock (it would be dark soon after three) when the quarter-masters with their retinue of sergeant-majors, sergeants and corporals and the long columns of vehicles arrived on the square. The flight-control personnel and ground crews, too, in so far as it had been possible to find them on the

roads and stop them, arrived with their own motor vehicles. It was high time: two Junkers and a big four-engined Condor were circling like bewildered birds over an abandoned nest. Without signals or information from below, without knowing what might have happened in the meantime, they dared not land on the broad cemetery of machines.

They received landing signals, descended and rolled to a stop. The pilots left their cockpits, climbed down and stretched their legs. Engines and propellers they left running; in twenty minutes unloading and loading must be finished and they must be ready to take off again. The two JU pilots looked around; one wrinkled his nose, inhaled suspiciously. Something had happened; something was not as usual. The normally lively flight controller was not lively: his face was grey and he was silent. One pilot looked at a Fieseler Stork standing near; a motorbus had run into it and stove in the cabin; there had been other collisions here too. He watched a truck winding in and out among the parked planes, halting here and there by a group of men and, after rapid enquiries by someone in it, driving on to the next group. The pilot turned and looked all round. On the snowfield lay dead men. He caught sight of the other JU pilot and sauntered over to him. They regarded a row of stretchers, on them men lying with bandaged heads, arms and legs in splints, stiff faces—frozen to death on the open field.

"Twenty-eight," counted one of the pilots.

"I've never seen such a thing in my life!"

And where were the medical orderies? Where were the seriously wounded to be flown out? Certainly there were passngers enough; all of them were wounded, or their eyes glittered with madness; but this time they came on their own feet.

"That fellow over there," said one of the pilots, and pointed across the snowfield to a figure in a high fur cap wading through the snow. "Eight pieces of blue cloth he had in his hand—offered them to me if I'd take him with me."

The man in the fur cap was on his way to the Condor.

"What's up with the Condor?"

"What a bloody fool!"

The Condor stood there with its mighty wings, the four propellers motionless against the winter sky. The pilot

had stopped his engines and was standing by his machine He was bent with cold, his eyebrows covered with rime, his face grey: he was too lightly dressed.

"What on earth are you doing, man? You've stopped your engines! They'll freeze up!"

"Freeze up?"

He did not know it or had not thought of it. He was an Atlantic pilot and only the day before he had come from Bordeaux via Mariupol. In a moment he was in his cabin trying to start the engines. They started, stopped, started a second, a third time, then stopped for good. The impulse-starter was kaputt.

Where to get an impulse-starter? There was not one for a Condor!

At first the Condor pilot did not realise his plight. But when he stood before the flight-controller he got a shock. "The Russians are advancing on Pitomnik. Rocket-shells are firing six kilometres from here," he heard.

"And my Condor?"

"*Mein Gott*, your Condor!" The flight-controller's eyes swept over the giant plane and over the field where some hundred and fifty or two hundred machines stood, not without impulse-starters, but without fuel. There'll be room for a Condor there! his eyes seemed to say.

The truck, which was still driving around, stopped in front of the flight-controller. A captain with a scarred face stepped out.

"Sorry, Herr Tomas, I've had them telegraph round the whole region. Nobody knows a thing, not a trace of him!" the flight-controller told him.

Captain Tomas was already driving away. He had been ordered by Army H.Q. to find a Colonel Schwandt, who with his troops was to hold Pitomnik village till nine o'clock the next morning, while the the supply-depot was being evacuated. The two JU's took off. The Condor man followed them with his eyes, then looked sorrowfully across the broad airfield. Batches of men were rising out of the snow and coming across the field. The Atlantic pilot forgot that he was miserably cold. How could rifles and machine-guns ever have been given to such mobs of wandering vermin? Those were not feet—they were bundles of rags on which they moved themselves along! No greatcoats—what had once been greatcoats were now only stuffed skins. Nothing but a pack of tramps—

blankets, mess-tins, here and there a cooking-pot, here and there a bright-coloured bedspread, some carrying pieces of wood they had picked up—firewood for the next halt. Faces, eyes, cheek-bones and noses protruding from a festoon of bandages, rags, filth and whiskers.

One of them limped up to the pilot, stretched out his hand and pointed to the cigarette in the pilot's mouth. The hand, which he had pulled out of his pocket, was bandaged up to the top finger joints, the fingers with nails like black claws poked out of the bandages. A wrinkled face, short-sighted brown eyes. The man must once have worn spectacles: there were circular rings where the rims had been, weals on the nose and sides of his face where once the spectacles had pressed the skin. The pilot stopped drawing on his cigarette; he stared at the man.

" An ally, aren't you? " he asked.

The man did not understand.

The pilot had an idea. " A Croat, aren't you? "

" Don't talk tripe, man, give us the dog-end! " said the soldier. He received the half-cigarette and took a greedy draw. It was Private Stüwe. He took another draw and passed the far-end on to August Fell; Liebsch, too, got one pull. The men waded on through the snow, mess-tins clattering, rags of blankets and things swinging on their backs. The pilot grasped it: these were German soldiers—of the front fighting-line! That was the moment when he forgot that he was miserably cold.

At the edge of the airfield the truck stopped. The captain got out, stepped up to a man, scrutinised him carefully, then gripped both his shoulders. " Latte! "

" Hannes. . . . Captain Tomas! "

" Hannes to you! And what are you doing here? "

" Withdrawing. We're to go on to Voroponovo."

" And the old man? "

" Vilshofen. . . ."

" What's up, what's happened?" Tomas asked hastily as he saw Latte's face change.

" Nothing's happened. Everything's all right—he's quite all right."

Tomas felt that something was wrong. He had last seen Vilshofen when they had laid Runz and Hedemann in the snow. What was the matter with Vilshofen? What was wrong? There was no time to get it out of Latte. Machine-guns were rattling out on the steppe, the wind carried the

noise over; the howl of rocket-shells was audible too. In the German lines there were mushrooms of smoke, mud and snow, and flashes of white light. Both looked in that direction.

"They've mounted the beastly things on their tanks; bringing them close!" said Latte.

"Is Schwandt's group out there by any chance?" asked Tomas.

"No, that's Keil's group—they're old acquaintances, by the way. You know them, Herr Hauptmann, they're East Prussians, 9th Machine-gun Battalion. The commander's out there in the gully, Herr Hauptmann."

"Why don't you say Hannes?"

"All right—Hannes!"

They shook hands. Latte went on behind his men. Tomas returned to his car. He wanted to drive over to the gully and pay a visit to Keil. It was the horseshoe-shaped gully running off and again on to the road, with the bunkers of the supply-depot. As in earlier days, the entrance was crowded with vehicles, this time those mobilised by the supply-staffs for the removal of the stocks. One after another drove down into the gully, stopped in front of the bunkers, and came out loaded at the other end. Tomas was about to get back into his armoured car when there was a sudden *rata-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-tat*. A machine-gun was firing, and in the distance an anti-tank gun was audible. A sharp crack—then for seconds a cloud of dust hung over the gully before losing itself in the misty sky.

After a pause a few more tank shells cracked out. And that was like a signal. It was too much for the nerves of the quarter-masters and their assistants. Pitomnik was experiencing what it had experienced once before. Lorries moved off, laden or unladen, manned or not manned; who failed to reach his vehicle shouted, cursed, ran after it. Tomas congratulated himself on being still on the airfield and off the road. He saw the lorries taking up the whole width of the road—first one, then two, then three, then a batch, then a whole crowd of them trying to pass one another, scratching sides, ripping off mud-guards. Some forced to the roadside, remained behind rammed into the ditch, or stuck fast in the snow. At steering-wheels sat panic-stricken men, feet on accelerators, hands on gear-levers. Those crouching beside them and behind on

the lorries likewise lost their heads and trembled when the wheels rolled slower.

And again it was not Russian tanks in pursuit, not Russian tanks wedging into the column of traffic and tearing it open, crushing vehicles under their tracks. The mere idea that such a thing *could* happen, the fact that something of the kind *was* happening a dozen kilometres farther south, and the horror coming up over the steppe was enough. As on the evening before, the vehicles stampeded towards the east, direction Halt 44. Some turned off towards Gumrak; others were forced off the road towards Pitomnik village, where they ran into a throng of vehicles in flight from the west. But these vehicles were not fleeing from a mere idea. They were being chased by tanks; their drivers and passengers had seen the tanks with their own eyes, seen trucks and cars cut off from the column of traffic, trampled on and flattened into the snow.

In the Pitomnik ration-store things were different. Shells from a single enemy tank that had broken through burst over the gully. As before, Keil's group lay under fire from rocket-shells and Russian tanks; but they held their line. Major Keil was a " go-getter," and had always been lucky, in the tasks assigned to him, in their carrying out, in his rapid promotion and in his personal fortunes. The task of defending this gully, and the condition in which the gully suddenly found itself, with doors open to the stocks of bread, meat, chocolate, coffee, tea, with himself as sole ruler of this fairyland—that was merely a stopping-point on a long road of good luck; the end of the road, perhaps, one could never tell. Not that Keil had spared any effort to make the quartermasters and their retinue see reason. " But it was hopeless, they were past hearing or seeing anything," he told Tomas as he sat in a cleared-out bunker with a telephone to his ear.

Keil was speaking with a Karl, with a Paul, with an Emil. He gave instructions, defined the line to which his men were to retire as soon as it was dark, and then added: " There's beef goulash to-day. And what else is there, Heinrich? " he asked as the cook entered. " Ah, listen—with noodles! . . . No, that's not ' tripe,' the goulash cannon's smoking—have a look round, you must see the smoke rising from the gully! "

It was indeed not " tripe." The " goulash cannon " was smoking and was full to the brim. The cook had only to

reach into the snow. There lay the heap, knocked over and run over by the lorries: cabbages, meat, sacks of flour. There were other things too—piles of wooden cases, clothing, camouflage suits, tools, chocolate, cigarettes, tooth-powder, combs.

"When the tank shell burst over the gully," Keil related, "they stood there as if they'd had a crack on the head with a mallet. Then when an officer came over the edge bleeding, that did it! No use shouting, no use doing anything—off they rushed and left the gully empty. . . ."

"The gully here will be held," Keil declared to Tomas. "till the stuff in the bunkers is all eaten—or till the Day of Judgment, whichever event arrives first!" He gave Tomas his views on the general political and military situation. Africa—yes, that certainly looked bad. And the eastern front, the eternal withdrawals, there had been just about enough of that. It was time the Führer spoke a mighty word! The British and the Americans—our U-Boats would see to it that that tree didn't grow up to the sky! The Russians—they were a hard nut, but they were bleeding to death; the more savagely they attacked the surer that they were nearing the end!

"The most important thing—Stalingrad must fall! When we've got Stalingrad the Japanese'll begin to attack. And in the meantime we'll get Tiflis. And there's the Turks—they'll come into the war then. If only we hadn't got such a lot of good-for-nothings the general situation would be a good deal healthier. A lot of heads ought to roll!" Such was Keil's opinion.

Tomas learned that Colonel Schwandt had stood to the south of Keil, on his left flank. He had allowed himself to be forced back, and in Keil's view must now be somewhere around Pitomnik village.

On leaving Keil's bunker Tomas at once set out for Pitomnik village. Tiflis and the Turks and the Japanese and the U-Boats—plenty of optimism, he thought. But that was how one must look at the situation, one must try to see it like that. But if it was true that Colonel Schwandt was standing by Pitomnik village, then Keil had an uncovered flank and the "Day of Judgment" might soon dawn for him and his East Prussians!

Tomas drove across the airfield. The flight-controller was still there. By him in the bunker lay the Condor pilot.

"He's caught cold," said the flight-controller. "Got a

temperature. A nice lad, a gentleman from Felseck. Got instructions from Mariupol to wait: they'll send him an impulse-starter If it doesn't come soon I don't know what I'm going to do with him. Seems to me we'll have to hop it before long! "

The road from the airfield to Pitomnik village was perfectly straight. It ran across flat country in the summer; but as Tomas drove along it now it was a narrow canyon cut in the snow. The snow walls right and left glittered in blue light. Tomas drove along without incident till he found an 8-tonner standing across the road from wall to wall and completely blocking it. The powerful Kfz.15 bored into the soft snow, reversed, shot forward, bored again. The driver and Tomas got out, dug, shovelled. Beyond the snow wall was the crackle of rifle shots and flashes as of an infantry battle. The Kfz.15 kept running at the snow; after an hour it was through and reached the road again beyond the obstacle. Soon afterwards Tomas found Colonel Schwandt in a roadside bunker. The Colonel was sitting before a petroleum lamp holding his head in both hands; a revolver lay on the table in front of him. He stared at his visitor as if he were a ghost.

Tomas introduced himself and delivered his message.

" Captain Tomas. I bring the Herr Oberst an order from Army Headquarters: Pitomnik village is to be held in all circumstances until 9 o'clock to-morrow morning to render possible the evacuation of Pitomnik airfield."

Colonel Schwandt did not move, did not offer the captain a seat. It was uncertain whether he had heard the message. His mind was far away.

After a while he answered. He seemed to be speaking of something that lay far behind him, something that demanded a great effort of memory. " Pitomnik village is an open door. Nobody can stand there now."

Schwandt had come out of the " nose " of Marinovka. Marinovka-Karpovka-Rogatchik—these were the stages of the flight of the troops in the Marinovka front salient; and many had not made all the distance. But that was not the point now.

Captain Tomas repeated his words about Pitomnik village. Schwandt repeated his words about the " open door." Tomas could get no more out of him. He was evidently absorbed in something that was not of this world.

The Colonel was again staring at the petroleum lamp, at the wall of frozen clay, and not listening to what Tomas was saying. Tomas glanced once more at the lean, motionless face with the grey stubble on the chin, at the pale eyes staring at nothing, at the dull brown weapon lying on the table. Then he went up the steps into the night.

In another bunker he found three soldiers, who started up as he entered. They had been sitting down to a meal; they had bread in front of them, and frozen meat which they were taking out of tins with their fingers.

Still chewing, they answered his questions. "*Ach, nein*, there's no fighting—that's ammunition going up in the air," said one.

It was ammunition loaded on lorries. Tomas got an idea of what had been happening; and he realised that Colonel Schwandt no longer had any troops behind him. For seven days Schwandt had been chased through the snow with the remnants of his regiment, from the Karpovka valley to Pitomnik village. There he had lost control of his troops as columns of fleeing German motor vehicles from the direction of Pitomnik airfield and from the west came together; his men had joined in the general stampede towards the east.

Tomas thought of Keil's threatened position. He returned to the bunker of the Colonel, who was still sitting in the same attitude and did not stir even when the captain used his telephone. But Tomas failed to get through either to the airfield or to Keil at the ration-depot; so he again left the bunker.

Having carried out his mission, Tomas set out on his way back, past the snow-covered bunkers. The road led into the village and into the broad main road from the west to Gumrak and Stalingrad and the surface of the main road was pitted with countless footmarks and deep furrows that glittered in the moonlight. Rifles, machine-guns, rucksacks, ammunition-boxes and dead men lay in the snow. A wrecked motor-bus towered like a black cliff in the middle of the road; a little farther on were two more; then a mass of vehicles jammed together had to be driven round. There were still a few soldiers from the west, on foot. They came into view in the snow, in pairs, in threes, in little groups. That night they dragged themselves to the village exit where the road narrowed like a funnel, and where, wheel to wheel, bonnet against bonnet, sides

touching, an enormous crowd of abandoned vehicles completely blocked it.

Four of five thousand vehicles, Tomas estimated. Flak and anti-tank guns, motor-cycles, and self-propelled gun-carriages. Staff-buses, ambulances, mortars, radio-trucks, trailers. And what must it be like six kilometres from here, on the airfield? and in Marinovka and Dmitrevka? What had it been like at Novo Alexeyevka? How many such heaps had the dying army spewed out and left behind on the roads in its flight?

These heaps of vehicles were abandoned and yet not quite deserted. Once more, before the wave swept over them, life twitched and reared up in them; a pitiable, despairing, abject, yet tenacious life. There were fires; there were petrol tanks, ammunition boxes, whole loads of ammunition going up in the air; there were wounded men, dying men, sleepers, eaters, drunkards, plunderers in these heaps.

Tomas could get no farther. He could stop here till the Russians arrived—till dawn at the latest. He could, like many hundreds before him, set out on foot. But there was one other thing he could do that no other vehicle had yet managed: he could try to get through at the edge of the heap. The Kfz.15 began again what it had already successfully done that night; it charged into the snow, reversed out and charged again. Tomas got out, and while the driver forced a passage yard by yard—using the shovel too—he collected planks, pieces of wood, greatcoats and tarpaulins from the abandoned vehicles and laid them on the snow in front of the car.

Thus Tomas got past the bottleneck. He remained only on the edge of this widespread confusion of wheels, motors and loads, roofed or covered only with tarpaulins, with snow outside and in; he could not know what secrets, what lurking places, what agonies these wrecks concealed. But he saw much.

He had seen much when six, seven and eight days before he had been on the way from Vilshofen's group to Army H.Q., when Karpovka and Dmitrevka had been abandoned in panic. He had known of the army order, issued weeks before, that every litre of fuel must be emptied out and put at the exclusive disposal of fighting vehicles. Yet when the withdrawal had begun and Dmitrevka and the other steppe villages of the Stalingrad western front had to be

evacuated—suddenly there had been plenty of fuel. He had seen the most improbable vehicles, from sports models, cabriolets and limousines to heavy lorries and huge buses, driving out of the courtyards. A whole army of officials, baggage, surveyor staff, commissariat people, repair companies and rear services were on the move.

And the stuff that was loaded and carried away, even if most of it did fall off on the roads! Tomas had seen radio receiving-sets, measuring apparatus and precision instruments being smashed with an axe, while beds, furniture, suitcases, pictures, loot, barrels, and sack after sack of foodstuffs went on the lorries. In Dmitrevka, where the main fighting-line ran through the rows of tents at the casualty clearing-station, a regimental quartermaster had not room for one wounded man; but on his hurriedly-loaded truck he had taken two fattened pigs with him—not for the troops, but " private property," as Tomas heard him say. Another vehicle, a small bus, also had no room for wounded; but it had room for three Russian women—cook, washerwoman and charwoman—who wanted to stay behind but were forced to get in with an R.S.M., a quartermaster and a transport sergeant.

At first that night Tomas saw nothing that he had not already seen—in bunkers at Dubininski, in abandoned wagons on the railway between Marinovka and Voroponovo, in Stalingrad during raids on the "Timoshenko Cellar," or Theatre Cellar, or in other hiding-places of the Stalingrad parasites. In a truck he saw a man crouching over a torn sack and stuffing fruit into his mouth with both hands. In another three men with sticky hands and red-smeared faces were sitting over a pot of jam and stuffing as much jam as would go into them. In another truck, padded with blankets and old rags, he counted a party of five men at a regular feast. They had quantities of bread, bacon and sausage in front of them, and chocolate and schnaps too.

"Looters are to be shot within 24 hours," said the army order; but Tomas took no action. Why should he? To-morrow the one with the plums would be writhing on the road with colic; the others, the men with the pot of jam, would probably gorge themselves to death.

He railed at the five who were having a regular feast He did so more from habit and disgust at the sight they presented, than from conviction. For what else could they

do in the circumstances than have a good tuck-in and wash it down with schnaps?

"Pack up and get to your unit!" he snapped at them. The only result was a blank stare, all five still chewing. However, he ascertained that three of them were from Colonel Schwandt's troops which were supposed to be defending Pitomnik village. The other two had belonged to the defeated 29th (Motorised) Division: for seven days they had been wandering from one lurking-place to another.

A shot crackled, a second, a third. A shell burst among the vehicles. A many-voiced shout; a sergeant ran by, bleeding and crying, "We're surrounded—Russians in white coats!"

Tomas reached his car and sat down next to the driver. The car had forced itself through the thickest of it. Now and then reversing, charging and boring they got forward bit by bit. The firing continued—tank shells. Lorries of ammunition blew up, sending fountains of fire and débris far and wide. Men poured out of the vehicles like drops of black sweat; singly and in little groups they waded through the snow, fleeing towards the east.

The sky was already grey. Tomas reached the open road, passed batches of men streaming back. His car dived into a deep gully, and when he came up on the road again he had a whole army column in front of him—without weapons, in tattered greatcoats, limping on sticks, stumbling forward on feet wrapped in rags. Many raised their hands, all shouted, all wanted to get to Stalingrad. Tomas picked up a bare-headed, grey-haired sergeant with a deep face wound.

That night Pitomnik airfield and Pitomnik village were lost. A new defence line was formed, partly of the retreating troops and partly of stragglers and starving men who let themselves be sent forward for the sake of a piece of bread. The new line was a few kilometres from the railway loop and ran southwards, crossing the Stalingrad-Marinovka railway and taking in Pestchanka. There it turned at an acute angle and continued to the Volga. Voroponovo was the centre of the front sector which, facing south-west and south, now became the scene of the heaviest fighting. Ten days before the 29th Motorised had withdrawn from here and had been caught up in the general destruction on the western front. The 297th and 371st Infantry Division, left in position here, had been so

decimated since the fighting for Kravtsov and Tsybenko that they could no longer hold, and the High Command found itself under the necessity of putting hurriedly gathered troops on the march in the direction of Voroponovo. Among these were Vilshofen's group, and the Steinle and Keil groups, both from Damme's division

Voroponovo. A water-tower, a cone-shaped construction of iron and concrete, topped with a thick head; a grey, spectral figure by day when snow was in the air, a jutting monolith by night when stars were in the sky. This storage tank was the visible centre and the eye of the steppe stretching endlessly to the south. From the foot of the tower nothing could be seen but a bleak field of snow-covered rubbish heaps and débris, a bombed and half-destroyed station building, and all around huts, stables and cowhouses, some partly wrecked, some undamaged.

All around were bomb craters, some merely open pits, some covered over and converted into bunkers. In one of them lived the station commandant, who had no more to do. In another sat field gendarmes doing nothing but play cards and waiting to be called back by their corps staff, which had moved nearer to Stalingrad, to Verchnaya Yelshanka. A supply-depot had been accommodated in other bunkers and in the adjacent farm buildings. The field-hospital was also partly in bunkers and partly in buildings. Under railway bridges were artillery positions. At the station were locomotives without steam, goods trains, passenger trains, auxiliary ambulance trains, that ran no more and had nowhere to run to. Sometimes, but only for a short distance, a trolley ran on the loop line. The line running to Marinovka and branching off to Kalatch and Tazinskaya had been cut a few kilometres farther west and was now in the hands of the Russians. Wagons, wrecked or undamaged, inhabited or uninhabited, without heating or heated with little iron stoves, stood in long lines on sixteen or eighteen parallel tracks. Among them was a grey, abject rabble of creatures who had once been soldiers and men. Now, bent, some on all fours, they crept to the station to fetch water or to find a piece of coal or something to burn, and rummaged in rubbish heaps in and around the station. That was Voroponovo, the last étape before reaching the front line, which ran only a few kilometres to the west, to the south-west and to the south.

Vilshofen arrived at noon and took possession of an empty bunker of the supply-depot. For his troops he had other bunkers and part of the farm buildings cleared out by the agitated tenant, a staff-quartermaster with the red face of a port-wine drinker, who at noon was still shuffling around in slippers.

But when at this grey mid-day hour a figure of grime and smoke stood in his courtyard like a dark post grown out of the ground, and this figure revealed itself as a colonel and commander of a strange regiment—that was the first sign of the nether regions. Slippered as he was, he had to go out and show the gentleman round the house. The troop that wheeled in through the courtyard door two hours later—that was the beginning of the eclipse of the sun. And wherever one went after that, in the house or the sheds or the yard, these figures were all over the place, and it was like wading through cow dung. Certainly most of them moved off again after a few hours' rest. "Rest" they might call it; but for him it was noise, even when they lay asleep with wide-open mouths. He could not forbear to let the captain know what sort of people he commanded. This captain made the most refined impression on him. He could never have raised this matter to the dark post with the hawk-face and the glowing eyes—he would sooner have bitten off his tongue. But he spoke to the captain; he fastened his belt, put on his peaked cap, stepped up to him and said:

"Herr Hauptmann, I must report to you that my two ducks, which were in the yard the whole time, have been stolen by your men!" And lest the captain should think the ducks a trifling matter at such a time, he added: "I've been fattening them for a long time. I am in the habit of permitting myself a duck for my Sunday dinner."

Receiving at this moment another piece of bad news from Sergeant Kulicke, he added to his report: "I have just been informed that from the stock of eatables I keep for the supplies-officers, so that they can have something to eat after their exhausting journeys, a ten-kilo pot of jam has been purloined!"

The captain was visibly impressed, at least he looked it. He lined the men up and said: "Now listen. If anybody happens to have eaten two fat ducks will he kindly note that that was the Quartermaster's Sunday dinner!" And stepping up to one man—one, it must be admitted, with

a red, jammy muzzle—and pointing to his smeary mouth, he said, " Private Stüwe, get your sergeant to instruct you that in special circumstances a soldier must wipe his mouth not only before but after eating."

In short, it was scandalous, it was a mockery, there was no other word for it. The staff-quartermaster was a man of principles; and his principles were being held up to ridicule.

" Left turn—march! " he heard the captain say. He stood there dumbfounded, with his belt fastened, his best cap on his head. He saw grinning faces and the marching feet of the retiring troops. It was more than a matter of two ducks and a pot of jam; it was a matter of the most sacred principles, and these were being trampled on by feet in leather and rags. The staff-quartermaster turned round and, badly shaken, tottered back into his " panje "* house.

In another sense, too, Staff-Quartermaster Zabel's instinct had been right when, on the entry of Vilshofen's group, he sensed the opening-up of the nether regions and the beginning of an eclipse of the sun. For in another forty-eight hours the main fighting line was to run right across his little estate. Vilshofen's group was now split up into two parts, the Döllwang group and the Latte group. It was getting dark as Döllwang left with his men; the Latte group arrived later, and when they marched off it was already night. It was the same hour in which Captain Tomas was on his way to the bunker of Colonel Schwandt and to the mass of wrecked vehicles. Latte's men, like Döllwang's before them, went past the water-tower, crossed the railway, left behind them the huge agglomeration of stationary wagons, a faint light flickering in some of them, and set out in a south-westerly direction over the frozen steppe.

Vilshofen remained behind with a few men. He kept in touch with his forward troops by means of runners; and a telephone wire ran back to the staffs in the Tsaritsa ravine. There was a cross-line to the neighbouring regiment, whose commander, Colonel Enders (as Vilshofen had learned from the artillery commander at Voroponovo) had been flown in three weeks before.

Vilshofen had a telephone conversation with his neighbour concerning the position of Enders's regiment and the

* Jocular nickname for Pole or Russian.

stationing of his own troops. He obtained the information he needed clearly and comprehensively enough. But this Colonel Enders seemed to be rather an odd gentleman. His staff, he said, were quartered in a brick-works, while he himself lived in a factory chimney. In his view the fact that reinforcements had arrived could only mean that the box around Voroponovo was going to be blown into the air for good. He had spent half the night reading the maxims of Lao Tse, very topical reading just now. And would Vilshofen kindly send the chaplain across, if there was one in his group; catholic or protestant, it was all the same to him; he merely wanted to have a chat.

Towards three o'clock in the morning Vilshofen reported to the rear that both his groups had taken up their new positions. Then he lay down. He was tired, but he could not sleep. Major Hedemann, Major Runz, Captain Steiger, Wedderkop, Tomas (Latte had spoken of him that day), Privates de Wede, Gnussel, Wahler, Dusch—an endless procession of faces and figures flitted by, and a succession of fleeting thoughts. The maxims of Lao Tse . . . and Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht, normally a sober and precisely functioning officer, gathering a coterie of gentlemen in the staff bunker to sing "Eine feste Burg" and other hymns to his accompaniment on the flute . . . and Voroponovo, the whole marshalling-yard, the whole town (so much he had already seen) full of sick and looting soldiers. And he, Vilshofen, he'd in his hand a bunch of starving but still disciplined and fighting soldiers, plus a devoted, trustworthy officer whom he first saw lifted on to the back of a pony by his uncle and who, growing up, had justified all the hopes set on him and was almost like a son to Vilshofen. . . . And what did Vilshofen do? Instead of preserving them for something beyond this cauldron of death, for something that would, that must come after, instead of saving his men for a future and better goal, he had them taken forward again, once more sent them into the fire to preserve for a few days longer, to spread a little more widely, the pestilence that already stank to high heaven. . . . Colonel Enders, Captain Döllwang—they were not the only ones—why did they send such people into the cauldron? Was it not as if Stalingrad were already regarded as a convenient place for execution?

The night came over Vilshofen. He lay without

greatcoat, without tunic, without boots, for the first time for many days under a proper roof, and slept.

Before daybreak Vilshofen stood on the platform of the water-tower among telephone wires, range-finders, men with headphones, and stared out into the dawn. In the night reports had come in about the abandoning of Pitomnik airfield and Pitomnik village, and about moving the line back to the loop railway. Latte and Döllwang had reported observations, agreeing with those of Colonel Enders, of movements in the Russian positions. A big Soviet attack was imminent. Vilshofen looked to the south-west over the snow-covered steppe. It would probably begin out there. Out there—he seemed to see them deployed in a wide semi-circle—out there must be the Russian tanks.

At his side stood the flak-commander, Buchner, a face he had already seen at Kletskaya, where they had slept one night in the same bunker.

Buchner was engaged in a conversation about fuel. "If we have to do a bolt from here it looks bad," said a lieutenant standing in front of him. "We'd better chuck the heavy flak away, Herr Major!"

"Out of the question, Stampfer! Drive over to Verchnaya Yelshanka, to Minina, go through all the gullies, poke round all the staffs. And take Januschek with you, he's resourceful, he can smell out where there's fuel. Fuel we must have, or we're lost!"

When Lieutenant Stampfer had left, Buchner turned to Vilshofen. "I don't know what they've sent us here for," he said. "On the western front, where we came out, there's a gap, and we'll hardly stop one up here. We've used up nearly all our fuel on the way and that's all that'll come out of it. What's up, Loose?"

Buchner's adjutant, Lieutenant Loose, had entered, "Excuse me, Herr Oberst. Herr Major, the panzer corps—it's a matter of changed dispositions, of moving the batteries forward."

Major Buchner reached for the telephone. "*Jawohl* . . . what? . . . put me through to the chief, please . . . to the Ia then! . . . The flak at close quarters? Have you gone crazy? It shoots best at 2,000 metres. . . . But, Herr Oberst, the guns'll be shot away like sitting sparrows!"

Vilshofen understood what it was about. It was true that the thin line of his men could do with some help. But

it was equally true that in the most forward line the flak would scarcely get a shot in and its help would be very questionable. "*Zu Befehl!*" he heard Buchner say as he rang off. But the tone said, "Lick my arse!"

A grey day. A slight wind blowing from the south-east, across the steppe and from the bend of the Volga. A flash of light, not snow-white but a reddish-yellow gleam, rose out there on the steppe. Vilshofen and the artillery commander on the Voroponovo watch-tower observed these rockets. Colonel Enders, too, through the spy-hole in the brickwork of his chimney; Colonel Steinle farther north; Major Keil in a snow-hole west of the loop-line half-way between Pitomnik and Halt 44; all the watchers from H.P.44 to Voroponovo and on to Pestchanka and the Volga and the south wing of the front against the bank of the Volga observed them. This signal relieved Major Buchner of the necessity to send his flak forward. The guns must stay where they were.

For Vilshofen the white stars exploding in the sky, and the immediate burst of artillery fire, meant release from an agonising dilemma. The apparatus that began to play—artillery commander, flak commander, range-finders, observers, wireless reports—held him in thrall. It demanded all his attention, all his experience, required his decisions. There was no room for questions; there remained only the battle.

The mechanism ran, even if it ran empty. The range-finder read distances, the commander marked observations of artillery positions on his map—even though there was not, and never would be, any ammunition to fight the enemy batteries. There was only just enough ammunition to direct against a massed infantry and tank attack on their own sector.

Minutes passed, and the rumbling of the Russian artillery combined into a single reverberating roll. The smoke belching from the barrels joined the smoke from rockets and became a single cloud rolling slowly over the white ground towards the German positions.

Through his binoculars Vilshofen noticed movement in the snow, white shapes on the white snow, turning, shunting. Russian tanks preparing to advance.

"Major. Do you see——?"

"Seen 'em!"

"Let 'em have it!"

"Can't—no ammunition!"

Minutes later. Russian fighter-planes. Diving, the squadron looked like a dark star exploding and falling in pieces. Zooming of engines—bomb hits—fountains of mud, débris, pieces of wagons. Black clouds of smoke rising from the marshalling yards.

A wave of hot air rose and enveloped the faces of those in the water-tower.

The flak was silent. The barrels were not even cranked upwards; they were set for firing at tanks: there was no ammunition for anything else. The flak commander could do nothing. Half fainting with rage, he gripped with both hands the railing of the observation-stand and stared out into the dirt and smoke and chaos.

Observation-stand? What was there to observe here but their own downfall? The smoke was getting thicker, and the clouds from the steppe, drifting over the village, rose high and swallowed everything. The platform of the water-tower floated like a gondola on a dark, moving sea. In Voroponovo was the noise of smashing metal and the thunder of bursting shells. The water-tower trembled like the mast of a swiftly-moving ship; it threw off its mantle of concrete and suddenly stood there on naked iron legs.

"Yelshanka's under fire!"

"Stalingrad's under fire!"

"Heavy artillery—firing from the other side of the Volga!"

That was in the rear. There too, over Yelshanka with divisional staffs and corps staff, over the city of ruins and over the Volga, huge clouds of smoke were rising. The explosions were audible for miles. The whole cauldron was seething, boiling over. All over the area a black jungle of smoke was belching up to the sky from countless fires and explosions. Flying in the smoke were mud, bunker roofs, barricades, fragments of paving stone, metal, work-benches, locomotive-boilers, garages, ammunition stocks, battery positions blown up with bodies, limbs heads flung a hundred feet into the air, to descend and be caught and smashed and pulverised.

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At Verchnaya Yelshanka, on the Voroponovo-Stalingrad road, there was a bunker, and in this bunker sat the corps-commander of the torn-up southern front, General Janicke. Janicke's bunker was trembling under the

continuous rain of bombs whipping the earth, and the air was full of dust. A bomb landed close by; the doors flew open, and the dust and snow and planks flew through the air. The general felt his cheek, then looked at his hand; the hand was bloody. Then he did everything at once, or rather in rapid succession. He had the doctor called; he had the commander of the infantry division defeated at Tsybenko called; he had his batman called; he had a telephone connection established with H.Q. The doctor bandaged his head. The batman packed his bags. Two hours later everything had been done.

Janicke's radio report of his being wounded had reached the personnel department of the OKH in Berlin. The chief of the personnel department, an old friend of Janicke's, had functioned, and Janicke already had the order to fly out The commander of the infantry division defeated at Tsybenko went into Janicke's bunker and listened with a stony face to what the white-haired commanding general had to say to him. The divisional commander from Tsybenko took over the affairs of the corps; he took over two beaten infantry divisions, a few artillery detachments without guns, and a Rumanian division without flak or anti-tank guns and mostly without rifles. General Janicke left the bunker to drive to Gumrak to be flown out. The gentlemen of the staff shook their heads and exchanged significant looks.

"Badly wounded—what happened?"

"A plank grazed his head."

"OKH, personnel department—that worked all right! The boss there's an old regimental comrade of Janicke's."

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In the ruins of the Stalingrad department store was a Colonel Carras. Freshly washed and shaved (he'd had to have the water brought through a street under the observation of Russian snipers) he had come into his room in the "toothpick." He wanted to take another look round and at the frozen Volga—a last look, he thought, before starting out for the Gumrak airfield. An hour ago the order had arrived for Colonel Carras to fly to the OKH to report. As he looked across the river he saw a flash of light and noticed the red fire from the long barrels of the batteries on the other side. One could have counted ten—so long it took for a 24cm. shell to land, burst, and turn a building into flying pieces of concrete, beams, metal

and bricks. Gone was the vision of a drive to Gumrak, a flight to Berlin, OKH and report. When Carras could close his gaping mouth again, he stood there with trembling knees and saw opposite not a skyscraper, but another "toothpick." Then it all came back to him: drive and flight and OKH and Margot and a look into eyes; but not into those "eyes of dreamy abstraction and pagan frankness"; he was looking into big staring eyes over a fleshy nose—"*Herrgott!* Report on the situation to the OKH, that means report to HIM!"

At that moment more shells burst nearby, the floor shook under his feet, clouds of smoke lifted, and instead of a house there arose out of the falling dust a wreckage of stone with jutting beams, the remains of floors with pieces of furniture suddenly hanging in mid-air. He caught sight of a body impaled on an iron girder at the height of the third floor, and pink blotches on the roof—the remains of infantrymen who had been marching by. At that moment Carras looked into the eyes of his Führer, and never had he been so near to him.

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Not far from the ruins of the department store were Lieutenant Wedderkop and Sergeant-Major Lachmann Together with a number of ruffians they were crouching in the narrow space of one of the Stalingrad sewage basins. The gang had just returned from one of its nightly prowls and had sat there eating and drinking; they still had the remains of the meal on their knees. When the bombardment began and the rumbling penetrated into the depth of their hiding-place, they tried to drown the noise. A pot of schnaps went from hand to hand. One man played a mouth-organ, another blew through a comb, the rest chanted discordantly. Wedderkop had recovered from his concussion, but he had failed to summon enough resolution to break away from this society to which, willy-nilly, he now belonged; he joined in heartily and sang louder than the others. That went on until the earth was shaken by a mighty detonation and the air was filled with mud and smoke and dust. And afterwards it was only Wedderkop and Lachmann that burrowed out into the light.

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Captain Tomas was sitting in the Kfz.15 with his driver and a sergeant whose face was torn open and bleeding Tomas had passed Gumrak and Stalingradski and was

about to take the road to the bunker colony of "Hartmannsdorf" when the blast of a bursting shell overturned the car and flung it into a snow-filled gully When Tomas came to and crawled out, the driver and the sergeant had vanished. After a while he found them both dead, and went on his way on foot.

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There was the bunker colony of "Hartmannsdorf," a territory guarded by a picked troop of tall soldiers. In one of the bunkers, surrounded by generals and colonels, sat a lean gentleman, a long bar with decorations from the first and second world wars on his chest. One side of the face of this high officer was twitching.

Moisture dripped from the ceiling. The water-glass drummed on the table. The general who was speaking paused, listened to the sand trickling down behind the wall planks, then he continued: "In my opinion the collapse can no longer be staved off. In the night a single Heinkel III flew in, an utterly ridiculous contribution. What we chiefly lack is heavy ammunition and fuel. There's not even enough fuel to transport our meagre supplies to the corps and divisions."

Again a shell landed nearby, again the earth rumbled, again the water-glass drummed on the table and mud crumbled down behind the planks. The lean gentleman with one-half of his face twitching turned to his chief of staff and dictated a radiogram: "Stalingrad can no longer be held. Starved and wounded soldiers, frozen to death, lie all along the streets. 1. I have therefore ordered an organised break-out to the south-west. 2. Please send machines promptly to fly out specialists (here followed the names of the officers). My own person will not be included."

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In a snowed-up hole between Gumrak and Gorodishtche sat Radio-Lieutenant Stetten. As he radioed the telephone message of the C.-in-C., he glanced through the little window-hole and saw ragged clouds of smoke drifting by. And the sky over the gully was black with drifting masses of dense smoke. . . .

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Under the same smoke-filled sky the commanding general of the army corps lying with its front to the north

and to the Volga was wading restlessly through the snow. His chin was stubbly, the usually well-groomed white hair was unbrushed, and the elegant horseman's figure was concealed under a fluttering camouflage mantle. A general of artillery—his guns were silent. He followed a trodden path in the snow as far as the road, then he turned back along the path. As one of the five commanding generals in front of Stalingrad he had once protested against the order to " hedgehog " and had demanded that the C.-in-C., even against orders from Berlin, should order a break-out to the west. Nearly sixty days had passed since then. Now as he made his way through the fields and passed in front of the bunkers to right and left of the gully, he saw the bodies of frozen soldiers that were no longer being buried. As he turned into the side gully, in which was his own bunker, he suddenly saw two infantrymen. Both were kneeling; one had his arms round the other and was holding his head.

" Don't lie down, August—you'll never get up again, you'll be done for! "

But the other did lie down. His comrade stayed with him; kneeling, his groping hands groped in the snow.

The general gritted his teeth. He, too, thought of the big staring eyes over the fleshy nose; and he, the sexagenarian, suddenly thought of his own father who, as a young company commander, when injustice was done to him, had attacked his colonel with his sword before the assembled troops.

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By Hill 107 was major Holmers, a thirty-two, commander of a detachment of motorised artillery. When the swastika had risen over Germany he was twenty-two and a law student, specialising in the mercantile and maritime branch. Moving with the times, and following his fellow students, he had become an S.S. man. Finding the S.S. not to his taste he had managed to sail out of it with a good wind and, still moving with the times, had become an army officer. As formerly he had studied commerce and shipping and the laws of the movement of merchandise, he now studied with the same eagerness the laws governing the movement of projectiles. These studies and this activity led him as an artillery officer through France, then to the gates of Moscow, and finally to Hill 107 by Stalingrad. Now he was there with all wheels stuck in the snow, with little

ammunition, few men and no fuel; in fact he was now nothing but an attendant to a park of guns, gun-carriages and haulage-motors. Of his men half had been withdrawn and sent to reinforce the infantry line, and the other half lay sick in the bunkers.

The evacuated bunkers had been peopled by stragglers from the retreating units. Now while the artillery battle raged, in which he could take no part as he had no long-range ammunition left, he received a telephone call from his division.

"Holmers, you can get away from your duties for an hour, can't you?"

"Yes, I can."

"There are plenty of men up there by the Tartar Wall, aren't there?"

"Yes, stragglers. They won't let them into Stalingrad, so they're all collecting here at the Wall."

"Now listen, this is a special order from the Division." And the speaker at the other end of the wire explained what the special order was.

Holmers answered with a laconic "*Jawohl . . . jawohl . . . jawohl . . .*". After he had heard it all, he said, "*Zu Befehl, Herr Oberstleutnant!*" And it sounded very little different from, and had the same undertone as, the final words of Major Buchner at another end of the front.

Holmers sat down and thought, "I'm damned if I will—I'm not here for that!" But the order had to be carried out. He called his sergeant-major.

"Sergeant-Major, we've got a special order from the Division. We've got to comb the Wall over there for men fit to fight."

"But, Herr Major, they're all sick and frozen and starving. If anybody there's not quite all in, he will be by to-morrow."

"Take B.S.M. Schulte with you and see what you can fetch out."

An hour later Holmers saw what his two sergeant-majors had brought back with them. It took a man from a Hamburg family of transatlantic passenger, cargo and emigration merchants to see them as Holmers saw them. Never did an emigration agent handle a more wretched lot, never did a more miserable crowd travel between decks, than this bunch of tattered, limping, gasping creatures;

never were human beings so sold as these, or sent to a more hopeless goal.

. . . . .

In a bunker in the Tulevoi ravine sat Gönnern, Damme and Colonel Lundt. Nearby a 15cm. battery was firing from four barrels. Lundt's regiment had been thrown so far back that sleeping room had to be found for Lundt in the generals' bunker. The three men were sitting round the table, with a piece of tarpaulin stretched over their heads like a baldachin, and down its sloping sides ran not only mud but crumbling pieces of the roof.

" I've just been over at Corps," said Damme. " Unschlicht is actually sitting in his hole and playing the flute—I saw it myself! Says he's practising a difficult passage and that it requires concentration and soothes the nerves. And as long as the artillery attack lasts there's really nothing else to do."

" I'd play the flute, too, if I knew how," said Gönnern.

" Yes, everybody's gradually going crazy," said Lundt. " I mean, of course, from colonel downwards," he hastened to add. " That reminds me of Captain Henkel—he's been found now."

" Has he? Where? "

" At the Tartar Wall. I had him fetched out of there by a lieutenant."

" I hear all sorts of people have collected there."

" When Henkel was fetched out I had a look round myself. A primitive hole in the ground. There were about forty men in it, officers or officials, all oldish men, hardly any under forty. A ragged, filthy, demoralised lot—they'd gathered there from all parts of the area. As I entered, someone was just finishing off a fried horse-liver—from a carcase, of course. ' But, gentlemen,' I said, ' can't you do anything about cleanliness? ' ' What's the use of worrying about anything, Herr Oberst? ' somebody answered. What can you say to that? "

" A frightful state of affairs," said Gönnern.

" And where did this Henkel finish up? "

" I had him sent to the front again. He never got there though: disappeared again. Well, I don't want to see any more of him. I only wonder why they send such people into the ring. The man has seen nothing of the war up to now; spent the whole time in a printing-works printing forms."

Gönnern, Damme and Lundt were waiting for Vilshofen, now promoted General.

" He's a long time, isn't he? "

" Well, he'll be lying in a hole somewhere on the way."

Outside boomed the guns of the battery.

"They'll never put out fires with these miserable sprays," said Damme. " It'd be better to save the ammunition for the infantry attack." Receiving no answer he went on: " Oh, well, there's nothing we can do here but stand and stick out our heads and fall; but at least we ought to know what for. Tell us Gönnern, what for? "

" We're here to fight. That's all I know."

" Tell me, Gönnern, how was it with old Blücher at Radkau? The Corps Commander mentioned that recently."

" He had no more food or ammunition, so he surrendered."

" That's just what I'm thinking of."

" Those damned sprays outside, they'll bring the whole flower-pot down on our heads. Where on earth's Vilshofen? If he were here we could at least take our minds off things with a game of bridge."

When at last the door opened it was not the promoted Vilshofen but the evangelist chaplain of Damme's division, Pastor Koog, who entered.

" Well, has Kalser turned up again? " asked Damme. (Kalser was his catholic colleague.)

" He's been seen at Voroponovo. But I've come about another matter: the case of Private Krämer."

Private Krämer had deserted his sentry post in front of a ruined farmhouse, crawled into the ruins and slept there for thirty-six hours—for which he had been sentenced to be shot.

" Quite impossible! I've spoken with him. The sentence cannot be carried out," Koog bawled into the ear of the Divisional Commander, while outside the battery thundered. The rumbling of the front went on, unbroken for even a second, the earth in the bunker shook and crumbling pieces fell from the roof.

" The man's not responsible for his actions, talks naïve nonsense, babbles like an infant. . . . No, he was like that the day before, and at the time he deserted his post. The man comes under paragraph 51, can't possibly be shot."

Damme shrugged his shoulders. He could do nothing.

" Krämer was originally a panzerjäger. Most of his unit

was forced westward near Kletskaya; he wandered with a few men to the east, to our side of the Stalingrad ring, with nothing but a revolver in his hand and rubber shoes on his feet. In those rubber shoes his feet got frost-bitten. Then he was with a fighting unit."

"Yes, he ran away there, too."

"Formal grounds can be produced for that. The man doesn't belong to our unit at all."

"He was picked up and posted to us."

"Herr General, the decisive factor is that the man is not responsible for his actions, and in justice and law cannot be shot! Moreover, he's a family man, has a wife and two children. He'll get over this, he's still young. The fate of a family hangs on his life——"

"I can't do anything about it. There are hundreds of sentry desertions. The men are all at the end of their tether, and not one is responsible for his actions any more. Army Corps have picked on this particular case and they insist on the sentence being carried out."

Koog had no time to lose: the firing party was already on the way. He ran to the other end of the ravine and stood before the Chief of the Army Corps, Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht, who removed the flute from his lips but did not lay it aside. Unschlicht still kept his lips pursed without raising his ascetic face from the music sheet—a 17th century psalm—while Koog poured out his arguments.

"Padre, there is no one in the whole army who does not need a thirty-six-hour sleep or even longer; and for that very reason the carrying out of the sentence is a military necessity." That was all Koog got out of him.

In these last days Koog had held he hands of, and spoken words of comfort to, hundreds of dying men. But this was something different, and his knees were trembling as he came out of Unschlicht's bunker. He saw three men with rifles, led by a sergeant, approaching through the snow. He hastened to arrive first at the hole where the twenty-eight-year-old bank clerk, Hermann Krämer, was waiting to be fetched for his last march.

The firing party arrived. Krämer was brought out. Koog strode beside him. The sergeant and three men followed, behind them the Court-Martial Officer. They had only a few dozen paces to go. Krämer was stood up against the snowy wall between two bunker entrances. With greatcoat tattered and worn by snow and wind on sentry post and in

battle, feet and head wrapped in rags, hollow face framed in a wild growth of beard, wide-open glittering eyes—nothing about this figure recalled the man's civilian occupation at office-desk and counter-window; nothing recalled a home, lamp on table, pictures on the walls, which he had left behind him.

"How I'd have liked to wait for the next bread issue! But tell me, padre, does one go straight to Heaven, or is there a sort of intermediate stage where there's also nothing to eat?" Koog heard the man say.

Chaplain Koog was helpless, found no words, no comfort, where none was expected; he stammered something: could he do anything for the wife and children at home?

"My wife's name's Ilse and the children are called Ilse—yes, and Gustl," said the man. Unbuttoning his greatcoat he drew out a bundle of crumpled letters. "There, send that back, and please write to her. Tell her I'd soon have been gone, anyway. I'm only skin and bone, I only weigh about six stone. . . ."

The Court-Martial Officer was getting impatient. He stepped a pace nearer and raised the paper containing the sentence to his eyes. Smoke drifted along the ravine like a black fog. It was an eerie performance, like the movements of marionettes. The Court-Martial Officer folded the paper again. Three soldiers—their greatcoats too were tattered, their eyes widened and glittering from hunger—took aim; fine blue smoke puffed out of the rifle barrels; and nothing was heard but the rumbling of the front and the roaring of the guns set up in the ravine. The soldiers slung their rifles and, led by the sergeant, trudged away. In the snow a corpse remained, of which Pastor Koog closed the eyes; a corpse that now interested none, that none even glanced at.

Later, Pastor Koog, pack on shoulders and blanket rolled round it, again stood before his Divisional Commander. "I beg to be posted to the Steinle combat group."

"If you really want to go into the thickest muck I won't stand in your way, Koog," answered Damme.

. . . . .

All this happened while Russian artillery was pouring thousands of tons of glowing metal into the ring and while tongues of flame licked upwards along the whole front. Human beings were being smashed, suffocated, torn to

pieces, buried under débris, flung a hundred feet into the air. Ruined houses were collapsing, the earth seething. Radio messages were being dictated and sent. New battalions were being recruited from bunkers full of dying men. A flute played. A man was shot. Combat groups were destroyed. Others—wedged into gullies, faces pressed to the ground—escaped and awaited the end of the outbreak of fire.

The bombardment lasted 30 minutes. Then came three-and-a-half hours of attack from mortars and rocket guns. Three hours of daylight remained—three hours of infantry and tank attacks. The men of Döllwang's and Latte's groups—groups resurrected from earlier mass attacks—in the Don bend, the Kasatchi hills, the Rossoshka valley—had learned the meaning of concrete shelters and fortified lines at such times. As the white flashes arose and the artillery began its work of destruction, they left the dugouts and positions taken up in the night and sought refuge in gullies and holes to the rear. From there they saw dugout roofs, concrete shelters and barbed wire flying sky-high. Thus they withdrew from the artillery fire with only slight losses. The mortar and rocket attack, however, cost them dear—nearly half their strength but it was the new ones, men drawn from workshop companies and rear services on the way from Pitomnik to Voroponovo, who nearly all fell.

Three-and-a-half hours of mortar-fire!

What that means is well known, and Döllwang knew it in theory. He knew that the man who cannot endure the massive whirring, whistling, hissing, the downpour of shrapnel, the man who springs up in the smoke-jungle of falling bombs, in nine cases out of ten gets killed or wounded and is lost to his unit. Battalions that have lost their nerve in the face of mortars have suffered losses of up to ninety per cent—and others sheltering in gullies and shell-holes from the same mortar fire have escaped with three per cent. Döllwang knew the theory, and he knew that, when it lasts long and the impulse to spring up is almost irresistible, one must cling to the ground with hands and teeth. For the first time he had an opportunity to observe the demoralising effect of such attacks on his own nerves, from the twitching of the little finger to the failure of the whole nervous system and the springing up in panic. From his hole he could not see into the snowy hollow that began five hundred yards in front of him;

but out of the hollow he watched hundreds of projectiles like thick-headed tumbler pigeons with flashing fishtails rising high into the air, then heard them in whirring descent before they burst in his own lines, an endless raging cataract crashing down on the hard ground.

In a hole so narrow that shoulders touched the earth on both sides, Döllwang crouched, knee to knee, greatcoat against greatcoat, cheek to jowl with another human being. The other was Sergeant Gnotke. Time stood still and the little finger no longer obeyed. And so crouched the others —five yards away, ten, fifty, a hundred yards away, in other holes. No way led to them, none saw them. The edge of a crater was the horizon, the limit of the habitable earth. The little finger trembled. Nearby a cry from one who had gone beyond the permitted limits. "Torn lung," breathed Gnotke: the sound of the cry told him the type of wound. As the howling of the wounded man gave way to gurgling, Gnotke relapsed into motionless, brooding silence, breathing quietly, hands hidden in the wide sleeves of his greatcoat. Glowing shell splinters swept over the crater. One fell and singed a hole in Döllwang's greatcoat. Gnotke was sleeping such a wakeful sleep that he opened his eyes at once, gripped the splinter with bare fingers and pitched it out into the snow. At this moment he noticed the condition of his captain. Not only the finger, the whole hand trembled. Gnotke's glance went from the hand to the face and eyes. Döllwang's lips were parted, showing teeth clenched hard. Nothing alarming in that, it was a sign of being utterly keyed-up. But the hands and the wide-open eyes staring at nothing! Half an hour of the heaviest bombardment, hours of mortar fire, and no end in sight—and to forget that there ever could be an end to it! There remained only the choice: to die or to go mad. But no, that was not true. There was a long ladder of trembling, insensitivity, hysteria, prayers, involuntary bowel movements; there was all that here in these surroundings, among the old hands and among those who yesterday were still working as surveyors or in repair shops or in other rear services. But to have the trousers "full" was not the worst. To jerk the head round at the sound of a falling grenade, then, paralysed with fright, unable to move a muscle, to lie motionless, exposed to a bayonet attack: Gnotke had seen that too, and that was worse. This captain, he knew, had only a week ago sat in some

Berlin office. And Gnotke was no longer the mere spectator he had been when he saw in the eyes of the schoolmaster Dingelstdt what was coming and yet had not moved a finger to avert fate. He was now the man who had pulled Gimpf out of the death hole. Only the motive was not the same: there it had been the terrible fear of being left alone that had moved him; here it was something else.

Döllwang did not know that he was deaf, unaware of his surroundings, utterly absent. He only realised it, and then not at once, when he felt the pressure of a hand on his own and a face began to take shape before him. And, strangely, as he saw this unwashed soldier face and the grey eyes, he saw at the same time the eyes of his aunt when she had suddenly looked at him at the breakfast table and he had had to say, "Sorry, Auntie! I was miles away—I'm afraid I wasn't listening." But here it was no mathematical or other problem, here it was the murderous din that held him chained, and it was fright that made his limbs tremble. He suddenly realised this, and some of his self-control returned. Gnotke was speaking to him; had said something to him that he had not heard.

"Yes, I expect they're all new fellows running out there," he answered.

"Yes, they're all new, they haven't been through this sort of thing in the rear."

"A stiff test of nerves," said Döllwang; and Gnotke gently withdrew his hand.

"Anybody who runs out there's done for," said Gnotke.

A conversation, somewhat broken in the endless din. And yet a human touch, a hand stretched out to Döllwang when he was on the point of being blown away like an empty husk.

A few yards away Stüwe sat in a hole so small and narrow that he had to crouch with bent head. With him it was not nerves—he could stand the eternal noise and the bursting of thousands of shells. But his muscles refused to function. Because he could not stretch out his legs he rocked his head ceaselessly backwards and forwards. Then he moved his toes and his hands at the wrists, for it was beastly cold. And at the end of it one would still have to stand a storming attack with swollen feet and numbed limbs—and then oneself attack too!

A little farther on crouched August Fell. He prayed no more, no longer thought of a collection plate, was hopelessly dulled and deaf, physically and mentally.

In yet another hole sat Liebsch of the weak bladder, equally dulled and deaf, bodily and spiritually, asking no question of God or Fate and knowing no answer. A single idea once hammered into him and pondered over remained: we hold the position, we must hold the position!

In other holes crouched Altenhuden, Gimpf, Liebich, Wilsdruff and Riess, and again a new man and more new men. Altenhuden with his twenty-six years was beaten and broken as if he had a thousand years of life behind him. Gimpf did not mean to go another step; he wanted only to lie and die and be buried in his hole. Liebich had reached the limit of endurance; he pressed his head between his hands, ran his fingers under his helmet and then looked at the hairs that came off on them. Wilsdruff had forgotten who or where he was, that he had a wife and children; he felt no more than a lump of clay might have felt. Reiss alternatively howled and cursed, swearing that this would be his last bombardment and his last time under fire. "Enough of this bloody mess, pick 'em and be independent like others do, there's enough stuff lying about on the roads to feed on!"

Altenhuden lay in the same hole with Gimpf. "Where did you get those thick fur-lined boots?" he asked. "That's a bit of all right!"

"I got them from Gnotke," answered Gimpf. "He gave me them for my frost-bitten feet."

"And where did he 'organise' them?"

"Not 'organised' at all, the Colonel gave them to him. The Colonel wore them before, now he's got felt boots."

"There's no end to this!" said Altenhuden after a while. "For all I care a shell can land in here, then I've finished with it!"

"I care, though; I want to get back to Nemitz some day and do some haymaking in the Grabow meadows. Don't you ever think of home?"

"Home . . ." sighed Gimpf, and it was a lost sigh under that sky in the surrounding din.

A piece of frozen clay fell into the hole. Altenhuden grabbed it. A piece of paper was fixed to it bearing in

large letters the words: "When firing ceases stay where you are. And when tanks come let them roll over. Don't shoot, save ammunition till infantry comes. Let them come close. Wait for the order to fire."

Altenhuden threw the piece of clay with the order on it to his neighbour Liebich, and so the order went on to Fell, Wilsdruff, Rebstock and the rest. It had come from Döllwang and from still farther away, from Voroponovo, from the water-tower, from Vilshofen. A runner had brought it through a defile, and then through a communication trench, and had finally thrown it into the front line.

Altenhuden, Gnotke and Fell, some hundred men, old hands and new, under Döllwang's command, and some hundred, old and new, under Latte, lay three-and-a-half hours under mortar fire. Bit by bit bodies lost feeling. Stomachs that had at first revolted shrank to empty sacks. Bladders pressed no more; they had found relief. Men had lain on their sides where there was room, and where there was none had managed without it.

For three and-a-half hours the cataract of iron, smoke and fire fell from the sky. And the sudden stillness was not the end: it was the climax of this whole gamut of horror. Sky and earth stiffened and men must not breathe, must make themselves small. Men crouched, knelt, lay on their stomachs, pressed faces into the mud.

And now it came: a metallic droning, rattling of chains, rumbling of frozen earth, the smell of hot oil; and clumps of clay fell down into the holes. The tanks were rolling over the dugouts. It must have been a bigger hole where a tank stopped for a moment, turned on its own axis and ground dugout, snow and men beneath it.

Artillery, mortars, tanks—a whole machinery of hell as German technics had developed it, German labour overdimensioned it, a German Generality misused it to trample on other nations. Here it was in sufficient strength to meet the challenge, rolling over German soldiers as they crouched like petrified mummies in the earth.

The tanks were through.

A new wave of silence—the artillery had been moved farther back—then men were heard again. Creaking Grinding. The clash of metal. Spades, Howling, snorting, animal cries, a wave of storming infantry bearing down. And now: UP ! Move stiff limbs, stand on numbed feet,

run on numbed feet. . . . Hand-grenades, machine-pistols, frozen urine, trousers stiff as boards with frozen shit—yell like hell!

"Hurra. . . ."

"Urra. . . ."

Gnotke, Gimpf, Döllwang, Ukrainers, Cossacks. . . . Fell and an Uzbek. . . . Altenhuden, Liebsch, Riess. . . . Kalmuks, Siberians, Russians, White Russians. . . .

"Urra. . . ."

Fire splashed into eyes, skulls cracked like egg-shells, Russians pressed their machine-pistols against belt and belly, emptied the chambers and reached for their knives. Lieutenant Latte lay badly wounded in the snow. From Voroponovo he heard artillery, an 8.8 cm. battery firing—"That's Vilshofen receiving those tanks." Latte turned his head on one side and died.

It was not Vilshofen, it was Major Buchner's heavy flak. It was also the guns of a 15 cm. battery, which from the same position had once wasted ammunition, joyfully firing at single targets, which had once scornfully aimed at approaching individual men. Now it fired its last shells and fell back into silence for ever.

Vilshofen stood at the top of the water-tower.

He was still standing there as night crept over the steppe. The line had held, to be abandoned under cover of darkness and next day to be no longer there. Latte dead, half the combat group fallen, the other half taken prisoner or scattered in flight—and a bleeding remnant coming back over the steppe. So the line had held.

Captain Döllwang, Sergeant Hanke, Sergeant Gnotke, forty-two men, and a few more supporting themselves on others, hobbled through the darkness, direction Voroponovo. That was what Vilshofen's group looked like now. Enders's regiment was an equally pitiable sight, so were the troops farther north, and Steinle's group and Keil's group; and just as battered and bleeding were the remains of the 297th and 371st Infantry Divisions that had been fighting by Pestchanka with their backs to the Volga. That night they all fell back as far as the railway, to take up new positions there. A new line was formed, but this time it was no narrow ring of steel, it was mere soft metal, beaten hopelessly thin. Wherever the next stroke might touch it there would be a hole.

IT WAS THE NIGHT OF THE 22ND-23RD JANUARY. That night letters were written in Germany.

To Lance-Corporal Matthias Linz: My dear Matthias, . . . no letter, not a word from you If this goes on I'll soon be like Frau Salm, she went right off her head yesterday. Thinking about the war does that, and of all people it had to be you, you at Stalingrad, my God. . . .

To Private Albin Hedenick: My dearest Albin. I thought my heart would break! Listen, you *must* come back! We don't want any other daddy. You've been so good to me, you fulfilled every wish you saw in my eyes! I feel sure I shall see my dear man again. No, no, no, Albin, nothing must happen to you . . . !

To Private Ewald Stüwe: Dear Ewald. One can stand a lot but I think you've stood enough. Things are getting worse and worse here in Cologne too. It's awful in the factory, not a bit of light or sun. The windows are painted black and all day you've got a bright lamp in front of you. And the horrible flies are there day and night. I'm not fit for anything now. My head aches, and when I think of you I want to howl, it's enough to drive anybody mad. Your Tilla.

. . . . .

It was the night of the 22nd-23rd of January. Döllwang's group were marching on the Kalmuk steppe, to the south of Voroponovo. One had to *know* that a railway line ran through the white waste, that a town and shelter were not very far away. One had to remind oneself (and it was not easy to a mind numbed by detonations, cold and hunger) that here—was it last night or was it long ago?—one had marched by rubbish heaps and sunken roofs and railway wagons. There was nothing in sight but snow. Whoever strayed from the road sank as into a sea, lashed his arms like a drowning man, struggled, shouted—and only the stars heard his cries. Softly the great twinkling stars of the steppe would come down to him, and one would alight on the crest of a snow wave and look at him and say, "No, no, no, Albin, nothing must happen to you!"

The voices of the homeland quivered with anxiety,

indignation, fear; with still lingering hope; with anger against a nameless fate. But the men on the Kalmuk steppe, on the snowfields and in the gullies by the Volga, knew neither anxiety nor indignation nor anger nor hope. In them was only a spiritless resignation to hunger, cold and exhaustion, a dumb submission to martyrdom.

Döllwang's troop, weary, heavily laden, numbed, were making their way through the snow that night. Their route—trodden, snowed over, trodden and snowed over again—led across hollows and through walls of snow. The water-tower would have been a guide, but it was invisible in the blue night. There were still "signposts," but these were no longer bunches of straw tied to stakes—the stakes had long since been taken away for firewood. Now every twenty, thirty or forty paces the route was marked by the gnawed bones of horses; here a thigh with broad haunch-bones, there a leg with the hoof jutting upwards, stuck at all angles in mounds of snow. Döllwang's men were on the way; another troop, like Döllwang's in single file, consisted of the remains of Enders's regiment. In front lay Voroponovo. Behind was no-man's-land and the deserted battlefield still raked by occasional salvos of shells.

Ahead, from dugouts to left and right, many trodden paths led to the marked main route. Of those scattered during the fighting and left behind, any man who groped his way far enough to sight a horse-bone jutting out of the snow could hope to find his way back to his unit. One of these "lucky" ones was Private Ewald Stüwe; another, from Enders's regiment, was Corporal Hans Daussig. Daussig had stopped by the roadside to listen, for none knew how far the Russians had penetrated into the territory. Stüwe, catching sight of him, stood perfectly still and watched his movements. What followed was scarcely different from a meeting of two wolves in the night. They sniffed at each other, walked side by side for a while, then sat down to get their breath. And the shadow they threw on the bluish snow was not very different from that of two unkempt, wounded wolves.

"What've you got?" asked Daussig.

"In the arm—bayonet wound. And you?"

"In the side—M/P, I think."

Stüwe's right upper arm had been torn by a stab with a bayonet. Daussig had a machine-pistol bullet in his side.

" Did your lot all do a bolt, too? "

" I don't know. I open my eyes and I'm lying in the snow—the fighting's stopped and it's all quiet and nobody about."

Both fell silent. Suddenly Daussig burst out laughting. Stüwe looked at him suspiciously. " Had one over the nut, haven't you? "

" No, but I couldn't help thinking of something."

" Must've been something very funny, mustn't it? "

" I was thinking of home. . . ." It had not been funny; it had been very disturbing at the time. But why should that worry him now? It was laughable that one should suddenly think of such a thing.

" Where are you from? " asked Stüwe.

" Berlin—that is, from Klotsche, in the Altmark, really."

" I'm from Cologne; I lived in the Gereonswall. But we'd better get up and get on to Voroponovo."

. . . . .

They had to get to Voroponovo. Soon they thought of nothing else; soon they knew nothing else. The snow veiled their eyes, and Stüwe knew nothing of Cologne and the Gereonswall, nor whether Number 5c still stood or lay in ruins; and he was far away from the cares of a Tilla, that for eight years had been his own cares. And Daussig—once he had been a musician with a good job and a flat, and a wife of whom he was eternally jealous. But it was all as far away as if it had been on another planet. Stüwe and Daussig, arms around each other, put foot in front of foot; all they wanted was a hole to sink into, a hole to crawl into.

They had only a few thousand yards before them, but it took them hours. They met a third, a fourth, a fifth straggler. Finally it was a whole troop that staggered on and reached the station and groped along the row of dark wagons. They were looking for an auxiliary ambulance train, and they found it. On the way someone had mentioned this train and maintained that there was enough room for them all in it. Where was there enough room? Only on the naked steppe and in the snow! But nobody wanted to admit that. Their tortured minds had seized on the idea of coaches marked with a red cross and fitted out with beds and blankets and stoves. Beds and blankets and stoves, and beneath them wheels—wheels standing on

rails! Sooner or later the wheels would revolve! Perhaps only to Stalingrad, perhaps. . . . Death was possible—shouldn't one think life possible too?

There they were, stumbling along by the row of goods wagons. With their own eyes they could see the red crosses under the snow on the sliding doors. Little window-panes had been inserted; through one of them a grey light glimmered. From other wagons smoke was rising through the chimneys that pierced the roofs. The wagons were inhabited! But no matter where fists were banged on doors or lumps of frozen snow flung at walls, no door opened and nothing stirred. Those seeking entry staggered on. They stumbled over frozen logs that had been thrown on the track along the whole length of the train. Why did they not look more closely at these man-sized logs? They did not want to! They did not want to see anything. All they wanted was a bunk or a place to lie down in. These heatable wagons, after all, stood on wheels and, if a locomotive were put in front, they could go somewhere. They found a wagon whose door gave when they tried it. Either the wagon was empty, or its occupants were no longer defending it. There were bunks and a stove—so far everything was in order. Those lying on the bunks moved no more. They were stiff. One could take hold of them, drag them to the sliding door, and push them out—and there was another bunk free! Indeed there was room for everybody. But it was difficult to climb in, and the one wooden step was too low. So they looked around and brought along some more of the frozen logs. The first step was widened and a second step laid on it. Now even those with leg wounds could get into the wagon. But those who brought the frozen material to build the steps (the other wagons had just the same sort of steps) could no longer help noticing that at one end they had a pair of stiff human legs and at the other end a frozen human neck in their hands.

"You of all people, *mein Gott* . . . no, nothing must happen to you . . . and you are still so young and fine! . . . And you, my poor dear husband, in Stalingrad!" Private Stüwe stood in the snowy night and heard voices. In front of him was the wagon with the red cross. He saw the musician Daussig crawl up on all fours and vanish inside. A face appeared before him, a big nose and pale eyes. It was August Fell, who had also remained behind

when the rest climbed in. With his uninjured arm Stüwe reached out and drew him close.

"Let's get away from here! Let's go to the ration-depot; I expect that's where the others are."

"Yes, that's where they'll be," answered Fell.

They left the auxiliary ambulance train and the station behind them.

. . . . .

The next day the main fighting line, which would never be one, which would be nothing but metal hammered hopelessly thin and a mark on general staff maps, ran right through the little farm to the ration-depot. Thence it continued outside the loop line towards the north, to turn soon after Halt 44, where lay Keil's combat group, towards Gumrak and around it before turning again towards the east. But, as already stated, this line was only a line on paper. It was left to the stragglers still being sent to reinforce them, to find out what this line really meant.

The day dawned without light and like grey smoke. And the men that rose up that morning in the yard of the ration-depot looked scarcely more than shapes of grey smoke. A name, a few words uttered by Sergeant-Major Hanke or by Sergeant Gnotke, and a section moved off. The men took their places in a shed, on the roof of a shed, or in a hole in the ground, and occupied the new position. This was done in a rather informal and unmilitary manner.

In contrast to the fighting men, a really military, a positively martial appearance was presented by the staff-quartermaster and his men, the R.S.M., the sergeant and the soldiers of the ration-depot. There were steel helmets on heads, leatherwork glistening on bellies, revolvers dangling from hips; there was a sentry at the gate, another in front of the ration-store, yet a third guarded another room. And—by order—a sentry had a tin of petroleum by him so that, if the Russians came, he could set fire—by order—to stores and rooms. The R.S.M. ran to and fro, checking the sentries. Every few minutes he went to the staff-quartermaster's hut, asked outside, "Where's the chief?" then went in and reported, "Nothing new!"

Since the previous night, when the rumbling from the front had begun and he had got out of his bunker, the staff-quartermaster had been, not exactly on his feet, but in restless movement. He was waiting and he had to wait.

The Division had advised him that the ration-depot was to evacuated, and to this end some lorries had been sent off; but now these lorries were several hours overdue. The quartermaster could not stay long in one place. Again and again he ran out into the yard, looked along the road, looked up to the sky, listened in the air, listened towards the station whence came the crack of rifles.

He went up to the room in which Captain Döllwang had installed himself. " Herr Hauptmann—"

Döllwang waved his hand soothingly. " Everything's in order, Herr Stabszahlmeister."

" But does Herr Hauptmann really think . . . would it not be advisable . . . ? " Suddenly the staff-quartermaster stopped speaking. The face under the steel helmet grew white as chalk. Outside it was as if a flock of little birds whizzed through the air. " That's . . . "

" A few stray bullets, Herr Stabszahlmeister."

The staff-quartermaster went back; he wanted to go to his room, to ring up his neighbour the veterinary officer, who, he knew, had obtained an armoured car and was only looking for a can of fuel. But the quartermaster saw a figure lying in the yard, a sergeant; it was his Sergeant Kulicke. He stared: " Sergeant! Kulicke! "

The sergeant did not move. His face was blue; there was a thin red line on his temple. " *Herrgott*, is he dead, is he dead? "

" Dead as a doornail! " someone called to him.

" Shot in the head! "

" He's done for! "

" Dead as mutton! "

A chorus of voices. Curious eyes. Grinning faces. Only Fell showed a little reserve: he clapped his hand over his mouth. Fell, Altenhuden, Liebsch, Gimpf and Gnotke stood around the quartermaster.

An hour later Staff-Quartermaster Zabel, the R.S.M. and a chief veterinary officer sat in an armoured car. The armoured car shot out of the gate—not a minute too soon, for now there were not only stray rifle bullets but mortar shells landing in the farmyard, and the buildings were on fire before the car turned into the road leading to the Tsaritsa ravine.

It was not only this farmyard and the neighbouring huts and ruins and Voroponovo station that were the goal of the Soviet attack. The offensive comprised the entire front,

and no single point at which the firing was concentrated could be held for long.

The hour of collapse had come.

For sixty-two days men had been dying like flies. Now there was only a remainder, not to be reckoned by the calendar but in wagons full of frozen human flesh, in ruined houses full of abandoned wounded, in dugouts full of starving men, in cellars full of bleeding bodies. What remained was a blizzard, was dawning day behind the broken fragments of a window pane, a flickering Hindenburg light among a crowd of dying men; the flash of artillery; the salvos of firing parties; the gibbering of madmen; the green glimmer of a world going under, and a sunbeam on a snow-covered road flattened by tanks rolling over the ice-crusted torsos, arms, legs and faces of fallen German soldiers.

Wagons full of frozen human flesh stood at Voroponovo, three wagons on one track, five on another. In one of these wagons lay the thirty-two-year-old musician Hans Daussig. He had heard all that was to be heard in these wheeled houses of death—the laboured breathing from clogged air-passages, the wheezing of ravaged lungs, a whimpering for a piece of bread or a drink of water, the raving of delirious and dying men. Now as the rime gathered on the walls and broke off the roof in flakes and settled on the grimy faces and figures, a long silence reigned. The stove-hole was black, no hand was left to stoke it. There was no more coughing, no crying out for a loved one, no chattering of teeth, no groans, no whisper. Daussig had a bullet in his body, and the festering matter in his belly warmed his body and prevented a rapid freezing. The silence lasted long, then there was noise again, this time outside the wagon—the bursting of 12.7 cm. shells. But in Daussig's ears it was only a weak crackle. A splinter tore a hole in the wall, let daylight into the grotto of reclining snow figures. The door was slid open. The spectral figure that staggered up and fell into the arms of a Red Army man was Corporal Daussig. He was laid on a sledge and taken to the rear. In a bunker with a glowing red stove the frozen blood thawed on Daussig's greatcoat. He had a piece of bread in his hand and sipped hot tea. A probe sank into his body and lifted out an M/P bullet. A thick stream of pus flowed out through a drainage-tube. Later, when Daussig awoke from

unconsciousness, he saw a narrow crack of light in the darkness. The crack could widen, and if there was enough strength left in him there could be light around him again. But there was not only Daussig; and there were not only the eight wagons at Voroponovo station. In Basargino and in the north by the Gumrak hospital stood row after row of such trains.

Ruined houses full of wounded had been abandoned at Kravtsov and Pestchanka. There were such holes full of wounded in Voroponovo, Yeshovka, Gumrak, Stalingradski, Gorodishtche, and beside all the roads of retreat to Stalingrad. Private Stüwe sought admission at the main dressing-station on the Voroponovo-Yeshovka road. He was turned away. There was room for sixty men, and already four hundred and fifty lay there. To obtain a bandage he had to tear out a piece of his coat lining. A medical orderly let him glance into the sick-room. Seriously wounded men lay on the bare floor. For covering they had had their greatcoats. Faces like clay lay close together in rows. If one man moved, the movement and the groaning communicated itself along the whole row. The collars of the field blouses seemed to be lined with rime; it was a lining of lice moving up and down the seams. Stüwe asked about food. "Half a portion of horseflesh," answered the orderly. Stüwe was given a slice of bread for the road and sent on to the next dressing-station. He wandered on. He was but one of thousands of walking wounded endlessly wandering.

Bunkers full of starving men all along the Tsaritsa ravine to Stalingrad. There were such bunkers, too, in the Tulevoi ravine and along the Tartar Wall all the way to Stalingrad. Under the pressure from the west, staffs, artillery detachments and rear services had left their built-in positions, and these were now occupied by stragglers, by the slightly wounded, the sick, the exhausted, and the looters. For them there was no medical aid, no food issue, not even the starvation rations that those at the front were still getting, no smoking field-kitchen. They could only gnaw horse-bones, the "signposts" they had picked up on the way.

One guest in these holes was a soldier turned away by dozens of medical orderlies—Private Stüwe. He was wandering over the steppe, direction Stalingrad. Crawling into a dugout for the night he often had first to drag out

a dead man to make room, before spreading out his rags and lying down on them. Then he would place a meat tin beside him; with pages torn from some army book, a few twigs, bits of motor-tyre picked up on the way, and a spark passed to him by his neighbour, he would fan up a tiny fire over which he warmed his numbed fingers and nose. The others had similar fires, and all lay flat on the ground, the smoke drifting by their heads. Sometimes Stüwe and the rest would get up in the night, scramble outside and scatter in all directions over the snow-covered land. That was when their ears caught the sound of a low-flying plane circling overhead in the mist and driving snow, vainly seeking a dropping-place for its load of bread, chocolate and tinned meat. Then they ran out into the night, sank up to their necks in snowdrifts, struggled out again, ran on, staggered back and tumbled exhausted into their holes. Occasionally one of them managed to find one of these food-bombs. Then, filling his pockets with pounds of bread, meat and cocacola, he would find some corner, chew all night and overeat himself, causing the rest of the bunker to be filled with curses and groans.

Cellars full of wounded who had never had medical aid—there were streets of these under the ruined houses of Stalingrad. And not only in the outer districts; even the centre of the town was inundated by the invasion of this bleeding wretchedness. Over a thousand seriously wounded lay in the centre of the erstwhile town command; some thousand lay in the cellars of Red Army House; some eight hundred were in the Theatre Cellar. At the Heroes' Square* three hundred lay under one arch, under another two hundred, then two hundred again. Seriously wounded men arrived one day, to be carried out as corpses on the morrow or the day after. Yet the numbers remained about the same, and the gurgling of dying men never ceased. And among the dying lay the fighting troops. Here on the Square were quartered the 4th Artillery Regiment, the last tank gunners and drivers of the 36th Panzer Regiment and the 1st Infantry Division, under the command of General von Hartmann. These units had taken over the front sector to the south, to the Tsaritsa ravine; and other regiments or remnants of units were quartered in other streets. Multitudes of stragglers and looters had crawled

* Square of the Heroes of the Revolution.

into the Timoshenko Cellar, the Theatre Cellar and other deserted bars. These places were visited daily and hourly by raiding parties that seized any men who could still walk and threw them forward into the fighting line.

It was the death agony of an army.

This death agony, the spreading loss of feeling, the failing consciousness, the progressive paralysis, was fanned by the icy night winds of the eastern steppe, lit up by driving blizzards, rocked by the explosions of shells. The army was disintegrating; the centre of the great organism was numbed; its nerve fibres no longer functioned; its limbs were paralysed. Men died, and the dead were no longer buried. In the streets of Stalingrad, in the gullies and on the steppe the corpses lay strewn like tree-trunks; and like birches felled by the woodman's axe they gathered their mantle of snow.

A captain was crouching over a telephone.

"*Zu Befehl*, Herr General! . . . The Russians are in Voroponovo. I've been cut off from the brickworks on the left for the last hour. . . . Reinforcements have arrived. Some of the men are sick, they were put on the march without rations. I had nothing to give them, we've been without food ourselves for two days. . . . The quartermaster carried out the order to have the stock here destroyed. . . . He had the order from his Division or from Corps at Yelshanka. . . . There's so much confusion here that nobody knows whom to take orders from!"

Indeed there was confusion. And it was not lessened by the fact that in the last hour, on the collapse of the southern front, Vilshofen's (now Döllwang's) group had been put under Gönnern; that Enders's regiment and Keil's and Steimer's groups had been put under Damme; while Buchner's flak detachment, between Döllwang and Enders, was still under the panzer corps.

"*Jawohl*, Herr General! With the reinforcements and the remaining ration-depot personnel I have a hundred and eighteen men. But I beg you to consider the fact that the farmyard is most unsuitable for defence. General Vilshofen agrees that the railway track two hundred metres farther back is much more suitable. . . . *Jawohl*, the Russians *are* attacking, with mortars, artillery and single tanks. . . . *Zu Befehl*, Herr General!"

A runner burst in. It was August Fell. "Six tanks from direction station, Herr Hauptmann!" Döllwang ran out.

An hour passed before Döllwang returned in a wave of ash, snow and the smell of sulphur. Altenhuden and Gimpf carried in a seriously wounded man; it was Lieutenant Kindt. Before they could lay him down and stretch him out they had to push aside the young quartermaster whom they failed to awaken from a leaden sleep.

Döllwang grabbed the telephone. "Priority! Priority!" he called, and his voice was hoarse. "The Ia personally!"

. . . . . .

The telephone buzzed in a bunker in the Tulevoi ravine. Gönnern's adjutant, Dr. Weichbrot, a young captain with a face like milk and blood, grabbed the receiver. The Ia was not there at present and the commander was not available at the moment, he had a priority call himself, he answered. "*Jawohl*, I'll inform the commander immediately. The farmyard's nothing but rubble. Lack of ammunition—for each machine-gun only one band, twenty cartridges per rifleman, five mortar shells. The farmyard can't be held. The Captain suggests taking up position at the railway two hundred metres farther back."

The door to the neighbouring bunker stood open. There at the map table lighted by two electric lamps sat General Gönnern. Beside him, with his back to the mud wall, stood General Vilshofen. Gönnern had not heard what had been spoken outside as the adjutant entered he waved him away. He was holding the receiver to his ear and carrying on a conversation with Corps on the same matter.

". . . But the farmyard no longer exists! Tell the Commander that! . . . No, it no longer exists, it's only rubble! Rubble, rubble, d'you understand, Unschlicht? . . . Two hundred metres . . . OKH? Oh, Lord, that's the end of everything. . . .

Gönnern laid down the receiver and looked at Vilshofen standing silently against the wall. The light of the lamp lay white on the map; around were night, blizzard, artillery salvos, tanks—Russian tanks! But there was the map with the lines decided by the OKH. Voroponovo, Yelshanka, a brickworks by the loop railway, a farmyard by the railway: these were within the line drawn up. Only yesterday Pestchanka, Tsybenko, Kravtsov were all inside the line. No OKH, no Führer's Headquarters: blood had blotted out that line. Yesterday and the day before there had been other lines and other points and other farmyards; blood had blotted them out too. And sixty and seventy

days ago the OKH had drawn up the line in the north-east on the Volga, by Latashanka, in the east on the heights of the Rossoshka valley, and in the south beyond the Karpovka rivulet. But when the troops fell back from the Volga and from Latashanka there had been puzzled enquiries from the OKH, ungracious questions from the Führer's Headquarters, and lamentations and epistles about the " needs of the hour " from the Führer.

" When in the west by the Kazatchi Hills and the Rossoshka valley the thing began——"

Vilshofen flared up. " The *thing*, Gönnern? I know we don't like to utter the word. But let's just say: when Hill 126 was still a hill of corpses, and when the Rossoshka valley was still a valley of corpses——"

" Well, put it that way if you like. When the army fell farther back—more enquiries, orders, lamentations, threats. Not only threats of court-martial, but the court-martial itself! "

" At this moment and in this particular case it's the concern of Döllwang's group, and no one but its commander can judge the situation and see what the situation demands."

" But you hear what Corps *and* Army H.Q. answer! The OKH has fixed the line, and without the sanction of the OKH nothing can be altered, nothing withdrawn! "

" So the OKH decides, does it? Where's the independence of the army, where's the exercise of its own judgment in any situation, where's the independence and initiative of junior commanders within the framework of their combat tasks? "

" That question has often been asked, my dear Vilshofen! "

" It's not a matter of your dear Vilshofen, Herr General! It's a matter of the lives and deaths of men. And the question is whether their dying has any object or is just senseless."

Gönnern stared at the map, at the black line marking the loop railway, at the black circle that indicated Voroponovo, at a cross that meant a farm; and line, circle and cross swam before his eyes.

All this time from the west, where stood the troops hastily thrown together and the groupings under Damme, could be heard the grinding of Russian artillery, softened by the thick earth walls. The baldachin over the map

table was partly displaced by falling lumps of earth, and bits of mud lay on the map and around the table.

"Why on earth do they leave us sitting here?" groaned Gönnern. "No useful work can be done here. Quiet planning and calm decisions are no longer possible."

"Useful work, quiet planning—I'd wish you anything but peace, Gönnern! The problem must be solved here on the spot. The question to be answered, not only by us but by all Germany, must be answered here among the thunder of the guns."

Gönnern looked up in anguish.

"We were told," continued Vilshofen, "that Hooth, Manstein, the whole army group would hammer us out and help us. Well, they have not hammered us out or helped us! Then we were told that our sacrifice served the army group and would help towards building up a new front. But the front fell back still farther, so we haven't even helped the army group! Now there's not much of us left, and what's left falls back on lines that we know in advance can't be held. Whom are we helping now, whom do we serve with our sacrifice? What's the sense of the whole thing, Gönnern?"

Gönnern ran his hand over his bald head. One could talk with Damme, one could talk with others. With this madman, who always went the whole hog—oh, he was grand when we were still advancing!—it was scarcely possible.

"It concerns the Döllwang group, and the Enders, Steimer and Keil groups too. And not only them: it's a matter of the life or death of an army, a whole army of men. The question is, has their dying any object or is it utterly senseless?"

"Well, I'll still say 'my dear Vilshofen.' It seems to me that the question of sense or senselessness is rather outside our province and beyond our competence. After all, we've got the order and we must keep to it, Vilshofen!"

Vilshofen laughed his grim laugh. He was really half mad.

"And after all, it's up to us here to set an example," Gönnern managed to get out.

"Hooth doesn't hammer us out, but he lays the bodies of his men in front of Kotelnikovo—that's an example! The C.-in-C. makes dark prophecies, radios one message

after another to OKH and Führer, demands freedom of action and lays our bodies in front of Stalingrad—that's an example! We've had quite enough of such examples. It isn't examples of dying that Germany needs, it's examples of living, doing the right thing at the right moment—and, when circumstances require it, against orders. . . . No, Gönnern, let me finish! Miscalculation, propping up the other man, over-estimating oneself, the whole system of mistaken and dishonest thinking—that's beginning to crack. And we here in Stalingrad are the crack. And the crack'll get bigger in spite of everything—it can't be riveted with corpses. Dying is a great thing when it serves a great cause, when it serves the welfare of all. But if men die to cover up mistakes, if men die to bridge a fatal crack—no, don't go away, Gönnern!—if men die to drive the cart more deeply in the mud, then dying is no longer something great, it's something small, pitiable, shameful——"

Gönnern was about to put an end to the conversation when the telephone buzzed in the next bunker and Vilshofen broke off. Vilshofen listened to the telephoned words that the adjutant repeated: "Captain Döllwang wounded. . . . Lieutenant Kindt dead . . . only one sergeant and thirty-eight men left . . . two hundred metres . . ."

Gönnern groaned. Vilshofen was a general without troops and without power to give orders. Gönnern reached for the telephone. "Priority, priority. . . ." Calling Army H.Q. he asked not for the Commander-in-Chief but for the C.-in-C.s "evil genius," the Chief of Staff. He would rather argue with him than go on listening to Vilshofen.

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The Chief of Staff had two telephones in front of him. Over one wire he was engaged in an urgent conversation with Damme, who wanted to withdraw the Enders's group. On the other line was Gönnern, who seemed to want something similar. Over the adjutant's wire the commander of the panzer corps was raising objections to the setting up of his flak on the railway to Voroponovo. Moreover, the Chief of Staff was handing to a senior court-martial officer a number of confirmed death sentences—for cowardice, desertion, theft, looting.

He nodded to a colonel who was just entering. This was

Colonel Carras, recently flown out and now returned in the last plane to land at Gumrak.

"Wonder what he's brought with him? Doesn't look good—no 'Heil dir-im-Siegerkranz' face, like when he flew out. No, far from it!" thought the Chief of Staff as he answered Damme.

"I can't alter it! OKH order—not a step back! And listen, Damme, what the devil's going on with your Keil group? The fellow's let himself be pushed over the railway. That'll have to be ironed out immediately!"

To Gönnern he said: "Two hundred metres? No, not even ten metres! I can't help it. It's not a matter of a few metres or a few men. The situation's serious. Tell the captain, tell the men, that the fate of the 6th Army depends on them alone. The order is: *not one step back!*"

The adjutant handed him the receiver connecting with the commander of the panzer corps. The chief gave the commander no chance to speak but barked: "The flak stays where it is! The flak is the moral support of the infantry. Make that clear to the detachment commander—what's his name? . . . Buchner then! *Not one step back!*"

Not a step back! The commander of the panzer corps received this order; Gönnern received it; Damme received it. Damme passed it on to Enders and to Keil. To Enders he added an apology, and to Major Keil a violent oath against OKH and "those up top"—and against fate. Enders replied by cutting the wire and flinging the telephone into the wastepaper basket.

Keil was immediately pushed back still farther by a counter-attack. Later, in a snow-hole on the road to Yeshovka, he got on the wire and managed to connect with his general again. But this time Damme had no comradely oath. He was cold and official; he reprimanded. used words to Major Keil—who since the Mius front wore the Knight's Cross—that drove the blood from that officer's face and made him forget his native Cranz, his father, his young wife, the factory he had thought to take over some day, made him forget himself. He ran out of the hole into the night of whirring shells and explosions and called his men together. "Hans, Heinrich, Georg—who's coming? An assault!"

. . . . .

In the brickworks by a railway siding Colonel Enders had not only cut the telephone wire; he had done more.

He was not living in the big chimney, as he had informed Vilshofen some days before, but in one of the ovens. This place had room for a camp bed, a table, a few chairs, travelling bags, books and utensils; but it was like a hothouse. Enders now sat there and wrote a regimental order—his last. He took off his uniform and donned his pyjamas. Uniform tunic and trousers he hung neatly on a hanger. He instructed an orderly to put out a few white napkins (he had flown in only three weeks before and had everything with him) and lay the table. Then the orderly was presented with a silver cigarette-case and dismissed.

Thus, a few hours later, Pastor Koog, sent over by Colonel Steimer from the neighbouring unit after the cutting of the telephone connection, found Colonel Enders's dwelling and Colonel Enders. On the table two places had been laid. There were two glasses (the second glass filled but untouched), a half-empty bottle, an opened book. Colonel Enders lay in silk pyjamas on his camp bed. On a suitcase by the bed stood a half-empty glass and a little cardboard box, empty, with the inscription " Veronal."

The last regimental order said: " In view of the situation every man has full freedom of action. I give any man permission to put his life in safety, to allow himself to be captured, or to do what he considers right and what, especially in regard to his family or dependants, duty may require."

And here in the brickworks Koog met his colleague, the catholic army-chaplain Kalser, whom he had lost in the panic near Pitomnik.

. . . . .

That night, amid the ceaseless thunder of artillery, Flak-Commander Buchner stood between the ration-depot and the brickworks. The brickworks were on fire. To the left was the ration-depot, already collapsing in a pile of ruins. In front was the railway; and all the heavy flak, all the detachment's remaining 8.8 cm. guns, were being hoisted on to the track.

Buchner stood on the snowfield, beside him his adjutant, Lieutenant Loose, and his platoon leader, Lieutenant Stampfer. In the light of the Russian salvos they saw the flak go into position; and, obviously, in the sulphurous light the flak guns showed up just as clearly to the Russians.

" The flak is the moral support of the infantry." That maxim Buchner had got in reply to his recommendations



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and pleadings, from the 1a, from the Chief of Staff, from the commander of the panzer corps.

"But it's madness, it's raving madness!" he suddenly shouted and clenched his fists. Yet he forebore to give the command that would have been against the higher order.

He had not yet had the report that all was in position, when suddenly all hell was let loose—artillery salvos and mortar fire combined. The rails glittered white, glittered blue, glittered red—and the wreckage flung high into the air and falling down out of the black sky was limbers, wheels, barrels, smashed metal—his heavy flak, his detachment.

"*Grosser Gott im Himmel!* . . . Loose, Loose, Loose!" yelled Buchner and fell into the arms of his adjutant. Loose and Stampfer were green in the reflection of the bursting shells. Sergeant Januschek wiped blood from his face and said: "Now they've made a nasty mess of it, Herr Major!"

. . . .

Six kilometres away, the scene separated only by a low hill, Major Keil, followed by a troop of his East Prussians, was moving towards the railway. Artillery salvos were landing here too. As one shell landed nearby the East Prussians flung themselves down. Heinrich Halluweit, the cook, raised his head and saw Keil dragging his injured leg behind him, wading on undaunted, with no thought of taking cover. Halluweit called to the sergeant-major: "Herr Feldwebel, what's the meaning of that?" Sergeant-Major Görritt shrugged and growled inaudibly in the din.

Others shouted: "Herr Major, Major. . . ."

Keil took no notice. He waded on through the snow.

Halluweit turned to Vierkant: "What's up with him?"

"Gone out of his mind! Karl ought to talk to him!"

Karl Wischwill, for years Keil's batman, knew the filling-station and the workshop at Cranz; knew Keil's father and fiancée. Now he waded after him, flung himself down once in the snow, came nearer. "Herr Major, Herr Major . . ." and then, "Herr Keil!"

Keil turned his head quickly, noticed that no one else was following him. "Rotters!" was all he brought out.

This was heard behind, but the men did not rise.

"No, we're not so crazy as that!"

"He's gone completely mad!"

"We're not committing suicide just yet!"

"Herr Major, Major . . . !"

Keil heard no more, looked round no more. He climbed on to the railway that was being raked by a heavy machine-gun, and was instantly cut in two.

No exception, not a step back! The Führer leads! He leads every single regiment, every single battalion; he leads Enders's regiment, leads Machine-gun Battalion 9 with Keil, leads Döllwang's group!

In Gönnern's bunker the telephone buzzed again. The adjutant picked up the receiver and pressed it to his ear. His face was now no longer like milk and blood; his youthful features suddenly looked like those of a tired old woman. The words he should have spoken—"Not a step back! The position must be held!"—refused to come to his lips. He lost his nerve, took the receiver from his ear, did not replace it, let it fall on the table in front of him.

But it buzzed again, and though the receiver lay untouched the distant words crackled out—softly, yet they filled the bunker in which were Gönnern and Vilshofen: "I'm mortally wounded—I can no longer hold—only twenty men left alive—I beg you urgently. . . ."

Again it buzzed, again the receiver crackled. This time it was: "Order carried out—the combat group has ceased to exist!"

Gönnern held his head in both hands. From his lips, through clenched teeth, came the words: "Tragic indecision. . . ."

A shadow fell over his table. It was the shadow of Vilshofen, who had no orders to give and no authority, but who switched the connection from the adjutant's telephone to Gönnern. As Gönnern did not take it Vilshofen pressed it to his own ear and called: "Döllwang. . . . Hans! Hans. . . . Who are you then? And where is the captain?"

He heard: "I'm Quartermaster Schweidnitz. The captain, *mein Gott, oh, mein Gott.* . . ."

The receiver clattered down on the table. Vilshofen's face was ice, his blood was ice, his heart was ice. Absently he heard groaning behind him, heard Gönnern's words, wheeled round.

"You say that . . . so you felt it, you knew it. . . . Gönnern, you have not carried out a battle order—you've carried out a death sentence! Döllwang, Hans Döllwang, my boy—and he's only one, there are many, there's a

whole army. And Gönnern, you are not the only one, if that's any salve to your conscience, you're not the only one! *Mein Gott, oh, mein Gott!* An army—and generals are executioners of their own army, of their own men! "

Vilshofen staggered to the exit.

" Madman! " Gönnern yelled after him.

Once more Vilshofen turned round.

" Deutschland! " he said. " That's not a mere word written on the blue sky! Captain Döllwang, Lieutenant Latte, Private Fell, Private Altenhuden, Sergeant Gnotke . . . whoever dies senselessly here, with him dies Deutschland! "

No sound came from Gönnern. His lower jaw dropped, his mouth gaped open, his face was ashen.

. . . . .

Kalser and Koog came out of the brickworks. Their way led along the inner bend of the loop railway. They reached the spot where the wreckage of Buchner's flak detachment lay over the track. They wandered on and came to where the remnants of Döllwang's group had retreated over the track, fleeing, wounded, dying, to hurry on or collapse in the snow.

Chaplain Kalser bent over a human form. It was Private Altenhuden, lying there half stunned, who suddenly felt a hand on his chest groping for his identity disc.

" I am the Chaplain of the 376th. What's wrong boy? " he heard someone say.

Altenhuden jerked round, faster than he ever had done during the whole campaign. " *Ach, Gott,* you startled me! I thought the devil had come to fetch me! No, no, padre, thank you very much, I don't need anything. There's nothing wrong with me, I'm all right. . . . Yes, transport to the rear, that would be nice. Something up with my leg, a flesh-wound."

" Unfortunately there is no transport. Keep on this way, then you'll get to the road to Yeshovka. Here's a trifle for the road."

" Oh, thank you, padre! " Altenhuden took from the hand of Chaplain Koog a piece of bread and a sardine. These came from Colonel Enders's room, where Koog had had stuffed his pockets with food that Enders had brought from Germany.

In the sky the Russian shells were spinning their webs of light. The ruins of the ration-store were silhouetted

above the railway track like great shark fins against the green glimmer of the horizon. Green light flickered too on the face of a man at whose side Chaplain Kalser was kneeling. " Padre, now I really can't storm any more! " said the dying man in the voice of a child.

" And you needn't storm any more. For you the war is over."

Another man croaked the words of a revue hit as he stared with crazed eyes into the flickering green and groped with both hands for the Chaplain bending over him. The Chaplain waited till he was still, then closed the eyelids and folded the hands on the breast.

The next was August Fell. He was gravely wounded, but fully conscious. His entrails welled out between tunic and trousers. Chaplain Kalser covered the open abdomen with the end of his greatcoat to hide the sight from Fell. But Fell knew how it was with him. His last fear was that he might not get the consecrated bread down. He felt a terrible choking in his throat; he could not swallow. The Chaplain broke off a tiny piece of the Host; with a little water from his water-bottle it was washed down. Before long August Fell's eyes opened wide and he was dead.

By Fell's body Koog and Kalser parted.

Koog went on by the railway and later descended into the Tsaritsa valley. Kalser turned to the north towards the Yeshavka road. He overtook the weary, the wandering, the limping; and in one of these groups were Gnotke, Gimpf, Altenhuden and Quartermaster Schweidnitz.

Towards midnight they were stopped by a figure in a white camouflage coat. In the driving snow stood others, machine-pistols at their belts. Orders were shouted: " Stop! Not a step farther! Come here, all of you! "

Schweidnitz was so exhausted, so tormented, that he failed to recognise his staff-quartermaster, the R.S.M., or the veterinary officer. And the others were in such a state that without a word of protest they let this arresting-party conduct them to the new line and put them with other arrested men and men of the rear services who were already there.

When Gnotke opened his eyes next morning he had snow under him and a tarpaulin over him, and there was snow on the tarpaulin too. He lay in a shallow hollow around him were blankets, greatcoats, rags. Something

moved under the rags. The hairy black head that appeared was Altenhuden's. Gimpf was there too, and some more of the newcomers. Gnotke raised himself; he lifted the tarpaulin and looked out. Open field, where the icy mist was rising, open field whichever way he looked, and here at the edge of the field were tents and a smoking "goulash cannon." Altenhuden also rose and looked around; then he sought Gnotke's eyes.

"On the open field," said Gnotke.

"So it's to be here!" said Altenhuden. Presently he raised his hand and touched his forehead with his finger. That meant: they must be dotty. "They" were those in the Tsaritsa ravine, or in Stalingrad or Berlin, or wherever they were who still carried on warfare here.

Altenhuden even said it: "They're dotty!"

Gnotke said, "I think you're right."

On that they were both agreed. Gnotke led his group, consisting of Altenhuden, Gimpf and a new man, whose name was Franz Schiele, to the "goulash cannon." Each got a slice of bread and a mug of horse-tea, that is, hot water in which horse bones had been boiled. Afterwards the commander of the fighting group, a quartermaster, stepped up to Gnotke and ordered, "Take a few men with you and do a reccy of the territory." He pointed vaguely in the direction where the Russians were supposed to be.

"*Jawohl*, Herr Oberschirrmeister," answered Gnotke. He picked out Altenhuden, Gimpf and Schiele. At the "goulash cannon" he had another slice of bread handed to each man, and the mugs refilled.

The four wandered off in the direction of some stumps of houses jutting out of the snow. Here they found a long piece of iron roofing. They worked on it, bent one end up, fastened their belts to it as towropes—and the sledge was complete. They also found a few charred remains of planks; these they loaded on the sledge. Then they placed their tarpaulins and other things on the sledge and took turns at pulling it. Thus they wandered over the snow, one group among hundreds roaming about and waiting for the end.

. . . . .

The loop railway had been crossed by the troops of the Red Army. In the south the advance had been through Tsybenko - Kravtsov - Pestchanka - Voroponovo, and the German regiments there had been forced over the railway

line. Enders's regiment had fallen to pieces. Döllwang's group had shrunk to that of a quartermaster. The remains of the 4th Army Corps—now only parts of the 297th and 371st Infantry Divisions and the remnants of a Rumanian division—were chased to the Tsaritsa, through Yelshanka and Minina, and pressed against the town border of Stalingrad.

From the west likewise the Red Army came across the railway, through Yeshovka and over the Tulevoi ravine. It flooded from the west and south-west, and simultaneously in a wave of attack from the north over the Gumrak airfield, reaching the bunker village "Hartmannsdorf," whence the Commander-in-Chief had to flee in great haste. He drove with his retinue to the Tsaritsa, ran into a mob from the defeated southern front, and in the ruins of a former sanatorium made a stay of only one night. Thence he drove on and took up new quarters in the centre of the town, in the ruins of the great Stalingrad department store on the Heroes' Square.

The Red Army drew the ring yet tighter. After Gumrak, Gorodishtche fell. Russian tanks advanced as far as the wall surrounding the Stalingrad airfield. Here the attacks were against the regiments and divisions which had fallen back and were still falling back from the west. At the edge of the airfield and by Hill 102 and Hill 107 the attack fell on the artillery, smoke-screen detachments and mortar troops in position there, and on the artillery detachment of Major Holmers.

The order was: Halt! Not a step back!

The main fighting-line allotted to this sector was the Tartar Wall.

Major Holmers was at his firing position, eight hundred metres from the Tartar Wall. The guns, formerly directed on Stalingrad and the Volga, were fitted with turntables so that they could also be trained on the south and the south-west. Thanks to a particular circumstance he still had ammunition; for when in the first days of the encirclement he had received the order to destroy his stocks of ammunition, he had shot off only half of it. That day the remainder was to be loaded. The barrels of his 15 cm. haubitzers, which had brought him from Byelgorod across the Donetz, the Oskol, the Kalitva, the Zymlya and the Don as far as Stalingrad, were once more to get hot.

The day was grey. A heavy mist rose from the Volga,

drifted in clouds over the stony gullies and the ragged ruins of Stalingrad, over the level ground to the airfield, then seemed to pile up on the way to the west like a dirty blue curtain behind the Tartar Wall.

"Temperature: 28° below zero. Water: Wish we had some! Atmosphere: Damp and misty, in fact thicker than ever; closing in all round. In front, a hell of a mess." So Holmers wrote in his diary that morning.

Atmosphere thick. He thought it was indeed, as he stood in his firing position looking out into the day. There were the "concrete wall," the "market-woman," the "tin soldier" and the "tennis racket"—thus a factory, a signal-box, an observation tower and a railway loop had been christened when the army first arrived here. There was also the "flower-pot," a small wood standing on flat ground.

Behind Holmers was the factory quarter. Here were the remains of walls, piles of rubble, broken girders, the ruins of workshops, a factory-chimney towering to the sky—shell-riddled at the top and in the middle and yet, apparently by a miracle, still standing. At the edge of the airfield stood the "tin soldier," the bombed, burnt-out remnant of a watch-tower. The ruins beside it were the remains of a former flying-school; here two generals with their staffs and the residue of their staff companies had made their nest. In the centre, on the open field, stood the "flower-pot," the tiny wood which, with its concealed artillery, mortars and smoke-screen throwers, formed the core of the defence system. This broad territory adjacent to the town of rubble heaps, factory ruins and twisted ironwork, was surrounded by a crust of earth running in a wide arc, the Tartar Wall.

In the firing-stand Holmers and the sergeant-major were staring in astonishment at this Tartar Wall. They had known it since the days when they had come over it with their limbers and haubitzers and had taken possession of kilometres of it, their men burrowing and hacking dugouts in it. They well knew the change that had come over it since they had taken their guns away and new occupants had arrived. They knew what the Wall had become to straggling, starving, dying men—a wall of silent death, for starving and freezing men no longer cry out or complain.

Since yesterday this Wall had been the new main fighting-line. And unless it was assumed that those of its

occupants who could still crawl on all fours would defend it, troops would have to be brought in to occupy it. This sector had been allotted to the 76th Infantry Division, the 113th Infantry Division and the 60th Motorised; but such troops as had arrived here were not even parts of these divisions.

Holmers and the sergeant-major stared at the Wall and at the thick curtain of mist behind it. Beyond the Wall ran the road leading from Gumrak and Gorodishtche to Stalingrad. The road was hidden by the Wall and not visible from the firing-stand. Only yesterday and the day before they had heard from the road the noise of traffic: engines, the rumbling of cart-wheels, the grinding of caterpillar tracks, the footsteps of marching columns. These were the transports that had still managed to find petrol; the staffs from Stalingradski, from Gorodishtche, the staff of the Commander-in-Chief from "Hartmannsdorf"; corps staffs from the gullies; medical, ration and command personnel who had evacuated their quarters and were moving to Stalingrad. Now it was quiet behind the Tartar Wall. When occasionally there were the grinding of snow and the roar of engines beyond it, they knew it was Russian tanks. The major looked at his sergeant-major and shrugged his shoulders. There was nothing to be done. Ammunition must be used sparingly; it could only be fired at certain and visible targets.

A man Holmers had sent forward returned. "Straight in front of us there's nothing, nobody," he reported.

"What are we to do, send some of our men?"

"Our few men?" answered the sergeant-major. "And who's going to fire the guns?"

An observer, lying far forward to the west, reported by radio: "The unit that should be here is not here."

"But that's the sector of the 60th (Motorised)!"

The sergeant-major shrugged his shoulders again.

"Thick atmosphere—and not only atmosphere; the thickest possible shit piling up all round, and it looks as if we'll soon be right in the middle of it!"

The observer in the west reported again: "Troops to the right of me. They're going back; what shall I do?"

"Go back with them," Holmers radioed.

What to do? The Wall was partly occupied; in some sections not a single man; retreating divisions and remnants of divisions, having failed to find the allotted new positions,

were wandering around. Those that did find their positions had no troops either to right or to left. Command system in confusion: " imaginary troops " all round. Holmers could not leave an observer forward in these conditions.

Suddenly wild shooting began, heavy machine-gun fire and bursting tank-shells beyond the Wall under the thick cover of mist. What was happening the artillery detachment and its commander did not know. Hill 102 was silent; the " flower-pot " was silent; the guns of Holmers's detachment were silent.

It was happening to Keil's group, which for the last forty-eight hours, since Sergeant-Major Göritt had fallen at Yeshovka, had been a leaderless mob. It was happening to the last of the 9th East Prussian Machine-gun Battalion, who had behind them a march through deep snow and in front of them the Wall, beyond which they hoped to find help. When the few remaining men heard the grinding of tracks behind them and saw Russian tanks coming in wedge formation over the open field, the cook, Heinrich Halluweit, who had taken over the leadership, had the heavy machine-guns put in position. But there was nothing but the open field and deep snow, and they sank in, machine-guns and all. The shots they managed to fire had no more effect than snowballs on the arm-thick steel plates. They merely bounced off. But the men hoped with their shooting to alarm the Wall. The Wall remained silent. All that moved within and staggered up and fled towards the town were the gaunt forms that had already lain down to die in the deserted dugouts.

The tanks came on. Most of Halluweit's group were flattened in the snow. The rest sprang up and ran for the Wall. On their left was a line of tanks, and on their right was a line of tanks. Machine-guns abandoned, ammunition in their hands, they sought, on the assumption that the tanks would not fire at one another, to find cover between the steel-clad monsters. They ran along in the deep snow close to the rolling tracks. But the tanks did aim their guns at one another, and any of the East Prussians that were not laid low by direct shots were killed by those that bounced off the steel plates.

The gunners of the " flower-pot " and those in the other detachments heard the rattling and awaited developments; but nothing developed within their range of vision. A

group of those spectres out of the deserted dugouts saw the machine-gunners staggering through the snow, that was all. Thus in the grey morning of the 26th of January, 1943, the last of the 9th East Prussian Machine-gun Battalion went under by the Tartar Wall.

. . . . .

A man with one sleeve of his greatcoat hanging empty came over the white snow-field. There were the howling of tank shells and the balls of flame leaping in the mist. But there were drifting fog, too, and poor visibility, and one solitary man didn't matter, anyway. This one solitary man crossed a ravine, the same Balka Krutaya across which days before Holmers had seen the figures from the collapsing western front. The balka was not very deep, but it split into a number of smaller gullies. A bridge had once led across it. The bridge was still there, at least parts of it. Other parts, including the wooden sleepers, had been carried off; the gaps were stopped with frozen snow and horse bones, and the bridge could still bear foot passengers. The solitary man felt his way carefully over the bridge, went on through the snow, came over the wall and arrived at the firing-stand of Major Holmers. There he entered. He was a lieutenant, a little fellow, still young, but with a face wrinkled like an old tree-trunk.

He introduced himself: "Lawkow." Battalion adjutant and finally battalion leader in Lundt's regiment. . . . No, where the regiment was now he didn't know. He was to have taken up position in the Tulevoi ravine, but had been wounded on the way there.

"My arm, yes, that's gone. In fact, it's in rather a mess, Herr Major!"

Lieutenant Lawkow looked round and his eyes widened with amazement. He nearly fainted at the sight that met his eyes and the aroma that rose to his nostrils. There was a sergeant-major bent over a flickering fire and holding by a long handle, as though it were the most ordinary thing in the world, a frying pan; and in the frying pan were sizzling slices of sausage. The pan was a big one and quite covered with them. Lawkow was speechless. The major's voice seemed to come from afar. Lawkow pulled himself together and answered the question put to him.

"Our Division—I don't know where that is. . . . Yes, that's true, I saw our general standing in the road at

Gorodishtche. He doesn't know what's going to happen, and neither do I," he said, and added, "All I know is, I'm awfully hungry!"

"Well, sit down at the table, Lawkow!"

The guest Lawkow, Holmers and the sergeant-major sat down to a guards' breakfast. And they didn't eat with their fingers; there were knives and forks, and three glasses too, and each got a schnaps.

"A thousand and one nights!" said Lawkow. "And if you ever come to Pellningken, in East Prussia, Herr Major, there'll be a sow slaughtered and we'll sit down to it till there's nothing left. Agreed, Herr Major?"

"Let's!" said Holmers.

"If only I could sleep now!"

"O.K.—get down to it right away!"

Holmers and the sergeant-major went back to the firing-stand.

Others came by. One was Major Buchner, who said he had had his men marched across country to Stalingrad and was looking for a Lieutenant Stampfer, who had vanished with all his baggage and the ration-column.

A few more alarms were heard: fighting contacts between Russian and German troops. On the territory in front of the Tartar Wall the attack mopped up retreating units and remnants of units and supply transports that had not got away. A wave of infantry and tanks came over the Tartar Wall, and the barrels of Holmers's guns intervened in the battle.

On the whole the situation remained unchanged that day.

The next day brought a change, together with a change in the weather. In the night a sharp wind had sprung up, a howling north-easter. The clouds were swept away, leaving a clear sky and sunshine, and it was so cold that crystals glittered in the air. Of the gunners that Holmers had placed at the Wall, and who had lain exposed to the wind, some had been frozen to death.

The day began with troop movements. Infantry appeared in front, on the Wall, left the Wall behind them, moved across the airfield, then withdrew to the ruins of the flying-school just outside the town boundary; that was General Geest with the remains of his division. The 54th Jäger Regiment, which should have wheeled to the north, did not wheel to the north: it turned about and also retreated to the flying-school. Another group carried out

a similar manœuvre. The withdrawal of the Jägers and of this group took place amid fountains of snow and belching smoke under the raking fire of heavy machine-guns.

The atmosphere was not thick that day; the air was as clear as glass. The troops—men springing up, bringing weapons into position, running and falling on their faces—looked like lines being drawn with charcoal on the white snow-field. After the infantry, right and left, had been driven past and the artillery found their flanks exposed, the air was not only as clear as glass, it was of a stunning emptiness.

There must still be some troops somewhere! There were: they came in sight of the artillery commander as fleeing mobs. There were still parts of the 76th, making for Stalingrad-North. There were still parts of the 8th Corps, also making for Stalingrad-North. Suddenly the whole corps staff of the 8th Corps appeared, making for Stalingrad-Central. A car full of staff officers passed quite near; one of the officers was General Vennekohl, another was Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht. Orders were not coming through, and the few that did get through were not clear. The chain of command had broken down; orders were confused, altered, rearranged, were at times non-existent. In corps, divisional and regimental staffs there were confusion and bewilderment.

In the empty space in the centre was one of the strongest concentrations of artillery: a mass of several artillery regiments, a mortar battery, and a smoke-screen detachment. Haubitzers and mortars were spitting fire. The air thundered. Smoke drifted towards the storming Russian artillery. Russians climbed on the Wall and over it. Russian tanks, making use of a gap in the Tartar Wall, squeezed through and rolled up on the airfield. Bursting panzer shells—gunners swept away—range-finders unusable—guns toppled over.

"Load . . . fire!"

"Load . . . fire!"

The Russian attack was concentrated on the artillery nest in the "flower-pot." The gunners in the "flower-pot" were without infantry protection. An alarm company which should have been there was not there. Holmers observed details from his firing-stand. He did not need binoculars for this; he could see with the naked

eye. Trees swayed and doubled up like bamboo stalks. Tanks broke into concealed firing positions and crushed under them snow, earth and men, then drove on towards other objectives. The "flower-pot" was trampled, flattened, annihilated.

Stalingrad-Central was now cut off from Stalingrad-North. The German army grouping in Stalingrad was split into two parts. From now on there would be two rings, Stalingrad-Central and Stalingrad-North. Artillery-Commander Holmers suddenly saw no longer two fronts: on the third side he found himself facing another front that was fast coming nearer.

"Load . . . fire!"

"Load . . . fire!" At last the batteries reported: "All ammunition fired."

"Blow up barrels! Blow up lorries! Blow up tractors!" After that there remained only flight, rapid flight to Stalingrad.

The next day, when Holmers woke up in a cellar in Stalingrad, he felt as if he were still in the midst of it, still among the acrid fumes of cordite between glowing rust-red walls of smoke; as if he still had before his eyes the annihilation of the "flower-pot" and the image of the general disintegration that followed it.

Hill 107—so he was out of the way, out of the way for good!

"Sergeant-Major, the tractors were all blown up, weren't they?"

"*Jawohl*, Herr Major," answered the sergeant-major, who was also in the cellar.

The labour squad of Russian prisoners left behind—good job too; what was there for them to do now? Rations gone too!

"Sergeant-Major, the food was issued, wasn't it?"

"*Jawohl*, Herr Major, all divided among the men."

So the food had gone west too!

"How about coffee, Sergeant-Major?"

"I'll see about it at once, Herr Major."

A crazy mix-up, this retreat! A general run on the town. Lorries, cars, tractors, marching columns, soldiers, generals, ghosts. In the midst of it ribbons of light from enemy guns. Sheet metal, patterns of ironwork, towering walls, the Stalingrad town boundary floodlit under the inky black sky. A group from the south making for the

north; a group from the north going south; so it went on right through the columns hurrying along the railway track and on both sides of it.

A crazy mix-up, and so thick you couldn't make head or tail of it! But Holmers got some idea of what had happened after he had spoken with an infantry captain and other officers of the sector. The greater part of Hill 107, Hill 102, the workers' colony—each of which places had once drunk rivers of German blood—and the airfield were in the hands of the Russians. The flying-school, with General Geest and the remnants of divisions, split in the middle. The attack now raged against the western town boundary and past the flying-school towards Stalingrad-Central, where it was driving a wedge into the town itself.

The sergeant-major returned. The breakfast was middling. There was no water for washing. There was no wood to melt the snow. Moreover, as an artillery-commander without artillery Holmers was unemployed—like many other officers and like most of the staffs that had flooded into Stalingrad.

But Holmers was given a task. Not a combat task: it was a special order from the Division. He was to comb the ruins and cellars of this quarter for men still fit to fight. That day he was to search the "White Houses." Together with his sergeant-major and his detachment clerk he set out.

The way was along a trampled path that led through courtyards and right through houses. The houses were burnt-out stone skeletons, doorless, windowless, with neither floors nor balconies; snow was falling inside them and when one looked upwards one saw the naked sky through four or five stories.

"All rubble!"

"You can't realise how much metal's been slung into it!"

"And where do we go from here, Herr Major?" asked the clerk.

"How on earth should I know? There, you see?" Through a wide gap in the wall and across sloping ground they suddenly had a view of the grey, frozen Volga. "That's the line; we shan't get beyond it."

The three stood in thought.

"So between here and that line then. . . ."

"Yes, that's where it's got to be settled."

"And to think that it has to be two thousand kilometres away from Germany!"

Their way led across fields of rubble. Whole blocks had been razed to the ground; they resembled extensive quarries; and corpses were wedged between broken pieces of stone. As the three came out of one of these street labyrinths into the open they found a row of high ruins in front of them. These once bright, tall buildings, now hollowed and burnt out by bombs, were the "White Houses."

The courtyards and cellars were inhabited. In the underground rooms, behind window-holes stopped up with sandbags, were staffs, the remains of corps staffs, service corps officers and supply officials. Other cellars of this complicated block of buildings were occupied by stragglers, drivers of motor vehicles abandoned somewhere or other, farrier personnel, the remains of dispersed veterinary companies.

The entrances to the cellars were barricaded. Paving stones, shop signs, iron bedsteads, lamp-posts and rubbish of every kind barred entry—not only to Russian attackers but to newcomers and to unwelcome raids by officers. Holmers had to ask *where* the cellar inmates of this house-block swarmed in and out. And only by bending low and crawling did they get into a cellar hole and then into a long corridor. The corridor was five feet wide, and here, against the walls right and left, was one grey face after another. From glowing meat- or sardine-tins rose stinking smoke; between man and man, or in the gap after every second man, was one of these tins with rubbish burning in it. Because of the smoke, Holmers, the sergeant-major and the clerk, although the room was high enough, had to move bent almost double; there was no room to crawl. They were quite unable to get into the holes and corners adjacent to the corridor. As they moved along they stumbled over outstretched feet. The moment they entered, as they blocked the faint light from the street, they were greeted by cries of "Stay outside! Full up here!" and "Hop it! What d'you want here? Look out, don't tread on me!"

Holmers, after a poor breakfast, unwashed and suddenly jerked from his former milieu into this abyss, was in the right mood to come down heavily on such boorishness and lack of discipline; but in this hole any such inclination

faded away. He nudged his sergeant-major: there was no point in barking at these spectres. The important thing was to get the job done as quickly as possible and clear out of this plague hole.

"Listen, everybody!" called Holmers. "For those fit to fight there's a field-kitchen out in the yard. Coffee and bread will be handed out, and each man will get a haversack-ration."

None got up and none made any move to get up.

Holmers glanced along the row of faces, so far as he could see them in the rising smoke. He met the blue eyes of one man.

"Is help still coming, Herr Major?" asked the man.

"Yes, is Hooth coming? It'll be different then," another butted in.

The mention of the panzer general Hooth was greeted with laughter; but this laughter was better and more human than the dull staring at nothing of the rest of them.

Holmers turned round. "Show me your pay-book," he said to one.

He read: Rifleman Ewald Stüwe, born 28/12/11, in Cologne; trade locksmith; Christian name and maiden name of wife, Mathilde Rautenberg; address, Cologne, Gereonswall 5c.

"Why are you crouching down there, Stüwe? Why don't you get back to your unit and a field-kitchen?"

Stüwe turned back his greatcoat and the upper part of his tunic, then lifted the piece of cloth lying on his shoulder. Holmers saw the bone showing through a lump of congealed pus. He jerked back from the rising stench of the wound.

"Had medical attention?" he asked, for the sake of saying something.

"None," replied Stüwe.

Holmers asked no more questions in this cellar. He even left alone the man he saw sitting dully on a half-sack of flour. He had no inclination to go into the next hole, in which a few men were crouching round a fire making pancakes of flour and water. He climbed through the window-hole out into the street again. But he was followed by four men who, driven by hunger, for the sake of a haversack-ration consisting of 400 grammes of horse-meat and 200 grammes of bread, were ready to be sent into the fire again.

Holmers fetched some more men out of another cellar. The adjutant laughed at him when he arrived with so few. What on earth was he thinking of? Men were needed; it didn't matter what *sort* of men. He wasn't collecting voters for a local election! No, by God, he wasn't, and so long as a belt held a fellow together he was good enough.

That was a reprimand. Holmers was furious with the adjutant and with the lieutenant-colonel who sat by the adjutant and glanced up at Holmers as if he were the wall at which he was standing. They sat there in comfort, hadn't the faintest idea what it was like in those cellars—it was easy for them to talk!

Holmers said, "*Zu Befehl!*" and went off again.

He went from cellar to cellar, and this time there was no turning a deaf ear or a blind eye. He tolerated no rudeness or lack of discipline. He had once before received such an order at Hill 107; but there he had passed it on to one of his battery-leaders. He had afterwards seen the figures: there, too, they had been wounded men, normally unfit. But now he must look at every single one—gaunt skeletons, stinking dysentery cases and starving men alike. Oh, hell—one wasn't a field gendarme, a policeman!

". . . and in these exceptional circumstances persons of authority are needed." So that blasted adjutant had said. And the other had sat by as if one were a pane of glass he was looking through! "We've hardly seen the gentlemen of the staff the whole time. They've been sitting in Yeshovka up to now, and so long as the front was still to the east that was 18 kilometres behind. What do they know about what's going on at the front? And what do they know about this? Let them go themselves and fetch out those plaster figures!"

But Holmers brought a troop of grey-faced men behind him, limping, exhausted creatures, in some of whose eyes glittered the madness of starving men. He cursed, gritted his teeth and climbed down into the next cellar. 400 grammes of horse-meat and 200 grammes of bread was a lot—more than enough, in fact, for the march was only to the town boundary. That was the end of the march, and in most cases the end of life. The town boundary and the wedge driving into the town devoured men, devoured skeletons, devoured the sick and the wounded, the rotten and decaying—if they could drag themselves so far!

Major Holmers was rounding men up. Major Holmers, a cultured man who only yesterday in his bunker by Hill 107 had eaten with knife and fork, had once had silver by his plate, drunk mocca after dinner, smoked a cigar. As he came out of one cellar and into the next he wondered why this curse had descended on him of all people. He no longer saw the sky, no longer heard the rumbling of artillery at the town boundary, nor the detonations of falling bombs in the same street.

Weary, done-in, nauseated by the atmosphere of the cellars and the stirred-up wretchedness, he sank down that evening in his own cellar-hole. He sat there at a coarse-grained table-top, his head supported in his hands, and stared into the flickering light of a tallow candle.

Z-o-o-o-o-oomp! Trembling earth—the clatter of falling wreckage—evidently a bomb, a direct hit on the neighbouring house. Holmers's cellar seemed to rotate on its axis. He stood in a spiral of white plaster-dust and yelled: "Insanity! Megalomania! Arrogance! Our own shit falling on our heads!"

The sergeant-major, officers, a lieutenant-colonel shouted, "Man! Holmers! Are you out of your mind?"

"Grossdeutschland falling in splinters!" roared Holmers.

"*Mein Gott*, things are bad enough for us as it is! Don't you think we're all just about going crazy?"

"We did long ago, Herr Oberstleutnant! Or did Herr Oberstleutnant perhaps mistake Russia for an island of the Azores?"

"*Mein Gott*, he's really gone out of his mind!"

"Holmers, listen now! The south ring's being overrun, and if the south ring falls it'll be our turn here in the north. The Russians have penetrated farther in our ring too. Report to the Division immediately! You must comb out the cellars again at once!"

"That order, Herr Oberstleutnant, I can *not* carry out!"

"Herr Major——"

"The cellars—no! Nobody's going to get me in there again! I ask Herr Oberstleutnant to send me to the front!"

"One man's no good there, we want hundreds, thousands! And nobody understands that better than you, Holmers, you've shown that to-day."

"Hundreds, thousands—twenty-two divisions have gone

already, but for the remnants in the cellars, Herr Oberstleutnant. *Mein Gott*—Herr Oberstleutnant is freshly shaved, let Herr Oberstleutnant go himself, let Herr Oberstleutnant stick his nose in that stinking sore——"

"HERR——"

The furious note made no impression on Holmers—he ignored it. "Stinking sore, the men covered in sores, with stiff legs, leaking bladders—that's what you want—go and fetch your cannon fodder yourself!" There was no stopping Holmers now: "Stalingrad—we've got nine-tenths of it already—we'll get the rest! The exhausted, starving, half-dead rest—we'll get it! That's the order to-day! What's it for? They can't fight any more, they're flattened into the ground! I've had enough of it! I'm no policeman and I'm no undertaker! To carry on fighting with half-dead men—that's—that's . . ."

Holmers banged his fist on the table, lost all self-control. The face of the lieutenant-colonel, still a smoothly-shaven face, swam before his eyes; he did not even hear what the others were saying.

He said: "That's sheer irresponsibility, gentlemen!" And he strode out, slamming the door hard behind him.

Those remaining shook their heads. One said: "Yes, it is enough to drive anybody crazy."

The lieutenant-colonel said: "He wants to go to the front—let's send him to the town boundary."

Holmers sat in a field of rubble in front of a ruined street-block. Fires raged over Stalingrad to the south. Holmers had made an abrupt break from ancestral good sense, solidarity and well-founded self-confidence. Four or five generations of carefully calculating merchants striving for and attaining the possible—only for him to commit all the errors that they had avoided; for him to drive through countries with lorries, tractors and twelve 15 cm. haubitzers and aim twelve cannon at the moon in the sky, at the impossible, and fire them too, and with TNT, with iron and dense cordite smoke, to draw a thick line through all his inheritance, through all those criteria of value and reason. A truly crushing balance-sheet, and enough to upset the equilibrium of even a tranquil man.

. . . . . .

The Stalingrad sky was overcast with sluggish smoke-clouds. In the centre, in the direction of the former Town Command, was a rust-red moving wedge reflecting the

flashes of artillery salvos and bursting grenades. Fires blazed upwards and showers of red sparks flew through the maze of streets to descend on snow-covered fields of rubble. The wedge dividing the town into two parts was gaining ground; but again and again heaps of mobile and combined units and combed-out troops were flung at the point and at the spreading flanks of it. The fiery wedge into Stalingrad and the reflection on the sky formed a sign visible from afar; and soldiers, officers, even the commander-in-chief knew what this sign meant.

It was the sign of the approaching end!

At the conference-table of the commander-in-chief stood the commanding general from the ravine by Gumrak. White-haired, slim, elegant, with deep shadows under the eyes, his face grown so thin in these last days that all the nerves seemed to show through.

His face trembled. His voice trembled. "On the way here I have witnessed scenes that beggar description, scenes that no words can describe! Is it realised what is demanded when the order is given to carry on the fight here—a fight with neither object nor objective?"

The general dealt with an interruption from one of the gentlemen sitting round the table. "No. We are no longer fulfilling an assignment. We are not helping to build up a new front, either by Rostov or anywhere else. That was obvious from the moment when the ring was reduced to a minimum and the Russians were able to withdraw a part of their forces here. And to-day, now that the ring is split in two, it is even more obvious! All we are doing is spinning out this ghastly slaughter even longer."

"Break out!" had once been the slogan in this circle. When that was refused the slogan was "Freedom of action" and when that was denied them it became "Fight to the last bullet! We must build up a sort of Alcazar; then we can hold on for months."

Now a general stood up and said: "Sixteen thousand untended wounded. Food, fuel, ammunition finished. No positions, no accommodation, no firewood. Among the troops signs of disintegration everywhere. That's what we found four days ago. That was formulated and radioed to the Führer. Gentlemen, you know what the answer was."

The Chief of Staff repeated the answer: "Capitulation is out of the question."

The general from the ravine by Gumrak looked at the faces of those sitting round the table. The Commander-in-Chief was there, the eyebrows and the left half of his face twitching. Two commanding generals were there; the general from Gumrak was the third; the fourth was in the cut-off northern half of the ring; the fifth, on the occasion of a bombing attack at Yelshanka, had been grazed by a plank and had been flown out. The adjutant was there, and a few colonels, including Colonel Carras with the latest directives from Berlin.

The general's eye lingered on the long horse-face of the Chief of Staff. The "evil genius" of the Commander-in-Chief—none had been more insistent than he was about holding on, yet he himself had wanted to jump off. While still in "Hartmannsdorf" he had wanted to go by the last plane to "report to the Führer" and not come back. An ugly scene, that, in "Hartmannsdorf." All night long he detained the last plane on Gumrak airfield, and all night tried to win over the C.-in-C. to his project. It took quite a "palace revolution"—the protest of the Ia and the adjutant, who declared that he would shoot himself on the spot—to stop the Chief of Staff from flying out. And the night when H.Q. was at the sanatorium, it was again the Chief who with his hesitations and delays over the move brought them all within a hair's-breadth of being cut off and taken prisoner.

"Capitulation out of the question," said this same Chief now.

These words hung in the atmosphere of the cellar and hovered above the conference-table. Something else was there too, something spectral yet real: the commander-in-chief of an army, a chief of staff of an army, three commanding generals, chiefs of corps-staffs, generals, colonels, all grey-faced, tired and overwrought, at cross-purposes with themselves and with one another, their nerves in shreds from ceaseless bombardments, paralysed in face of approaching doom, condemned to extinction and required to carry out the death sentence on their own men. But as they sat there together there was nothing but a single heel-click and a single: "The order will be carried out!"

"The order will be carried out." Even against better judgment, against conscience, against honour. The white-haired general from Gumrak—thirty years a soldier, two

hundred years of military tradition—tottered up: "Is it possible that an order can be incompatible with honour?"

Yes, it was possible; it was happening before his eyes. The cultured face of the Commander-in-Chief, the horse-face of the Chief of Staff, the cat-face of Colonel Carras with the green eyes, the whole company round the table, faces, shoulder-tabs, decorations, revolved round him in a circle. At that moment his face was whiter, thinner, than ever.

"Three culmination points—let us sum up once again, Gentlemen. On the 22nd of November, 1942, we received the order to 'hedgehog.' An order unknown on such a scale in the whole history of war—for an army of twenty-two divisions, three hundred thousand men. How were they to be supplied? We expressed our doubts. To-day we know: Field-Marshal von Manstein, Field-Marshal von Weichs, the Chief of General Staff appointed by the Führer, even the Generals of the Luftwaffe, doubted the possibility of adequately supplying them. The difficult weather conditions; the great flying distances becoming greater with the rapid falling back of the front; the broad steppe stretching out without tree or bush; the slow transport-machines practically at the mercy of anti-aircraft guns—those were the considerations. But what of that? In the Valdai Hills they'd 'managed' it with six divisions—why shouldn't they manage it here with twenty-two. If you'll excuse me, gentlemen—what made that view so tempting was overweening conceit! And to-day we know: one man, the Reichsmarschall, stood up and said: 'Mein Führer, I undertake to supply the 6th Army.' Against that voice the doubts of two army leaders, two Luftwaffe Generals, the Chief of General Staff, weighed little; against that voice our own judgment of the situation weighed little. We received the order and we obeyed in spite of our different estimates of the situation. That was on the 22nd of November, 1942.

"The second fateful day was the 10th of January: the day of the Russian offer of capitulation terms." The general noticed for a moment the cold glitter in the eyes of the Chief of Staff who, deputising for the Commander-in-Chief, had given the order to shoot at approaching Russian negotiators. "Well, gentlemen, at that time we really were at the end of our resources. We had troops down with dysentery and dying of exhaustion. The bankruptcy of

the Luftwaffe was proved over the corpses of over a hundred thousand of our men. Surely that was enough! We advised the Commander-in-Chief and demanded freedom of action, if not for capitulation, then for a desperate break-through to the west. Again it was forbidden. 'Where you stand, there you stay!' they said. There before us stood Hube, just back from Berlin. Now he's really flown out for good, to organise the supplying. Pardon me, but that's idiotic—what is there to organise now? I saw the last days at Gumrak. It's chaos there, and we shan't organise it—we'd just tumble into it with our eyes open. Well, there stood Hube and said: 'Then we'll have to make it a sort of Alcazar, that's all!' And that's what the order came to, and we who knew better – we, not the gentlemen in Berlin, saw the doom of our men before our eyes—we obeyed!"

The speaker paused and wiped the perspiration from his brow. "Gentlemen, I protest!"

Against what, they wanted to know. The Commander-in-Chief was in anguish and resolved in advance to file the protest and not pass it on; the Chief of Staff was full of malevolent curiosity; Colonel Carras understood and admired the words that he would never have spoken himself.

"The third fateful day was the 22nd of January. We demanded freedom of action: we desired to avoid utter disintegration. Answer: 'Capitulation out of the question!' That meant: 'Where you stand, there you go under!' Sixteen thousand untended wounded there were four days ago. What change has taken place since then? The number of untended *and no longer fed* wounded has multiplied. The men are falling, starving or freezing to death *senselessly*. The fighting reserve of infantry—scratched together out of artillery, smoke-screen, signal and service corps men—has been used up to the last man. The fight is being carried on by the half-dead and the dying! And to what end? To drive ourselves into chaos without hope of salvation! What's demanded and ordered here is against conscience and against honour, even military honour! I protest, and I beg you to take note of my protest and pass it on!"

It was a ghostly company in the cellar.

"Gentlemen, how do you imagine it's going to end?"

The Commander-in-Chief was troubled more than the

others with imaginings; he did not want to imagine anything, nor to know what anybody else might be imagining.

"I shall obey!" he said.

With that the conference was at an end The advisers were dismissed. They rose, scarcely exchanging a word, and almost fled. Colonel Carras stopped in the corridor. The Commander-in-Chief passed by, a tall slim figure. He had been a general-staff officer in the first world war, and afterwards an instructor at the Academy of Warfare. The gifted son of a magisterial official, he was excellent as first adviser, as chief of the High Command, and in the planning of operations. But here, thought Carras, something else was wanted—the bold hand of a commander who not only thinks but acts on his own initiative and in a difficult situation fearlessly takes over responsibility. But that was just what the C.-in-C. hadn't got; no, he hadn't got it at all!

"He suffers like Christ on the cross and carries out the order," Carras remarked to the chief of a corps-staff, Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht, who was also looking at the retreating figure of the C.-in-C. Unschlicht merely looked at Carras, turned up his greatcoat collar and vanished. Never again would this company meet round a table. It was a ghostly company that broke up here. The protest, too, had been nothing but ghostly. And the general from Gumrak knew it!

"What happens in the immediate and the distant future will happen without human agency; it will be nothing but the movements and actions of ghosts." So he told himself as he strode through the gateway of the ruined house, passed the saluting sentry and the 10.5 haubitzer in position there, and entered the broad square, which at this hour was drenched with the chalk-white glare of searchlights as planes zoomed overhead dropping their loads—loaves, meat and tinned foods—without parachutes.

The General strode past barricades, sandbags, barbed-wire fences. He saw the sentries of the collecting-party standing around, and heard the crackle of rifle shots across the square. Without looking across he took the road to the Volga and to the ruin in which he dwelt. Then he changed his mind.

"I think I *will* move to the town boundary. Have our few things brought there, will you?" he said to his

escort-officer. He turned round and went back across the Heroes' Square.

Cursing. Howling. A General protests. A major refuses to obey an order. Junior commanders ignore orders. But it did not stop the run of death. Men still fell at the town boundary and in the streets leading to the centre. Arrest parties still held up stragglers and wandering troops. Officers still combed the cellars and mobilised the wounded, the frost-bitten and the sick. German soldiers in the Stalingrad plantation of death still died of hunger and exhaustion. The rifles of the food-collecting parties and the firing-parties still crackled.

A hundred paces from the Heroes' Square and Army H.Q. was the tall ruin of the former Town Theatre. The side of it facing the square was in darkness; the other side was red with the reflection of fires. The building was roofless and burnt out; its walls embraced only a field of rubble.

But the cellars under the rubble were inhabited, and corridors led to neighbouring ruins and cellars. Here stretched out a whole labyrinthine village of cellars. Here, a day and a half ago, Captain Tomas, with a shrapnel wound in his head, had found sanctuary. Amid the screaming, trembling and raving of dying men he had almost forgotten the rumbling world outside. Whether there was shooting out there, whether it was day or night, whether snow fell from the sky, whether a gale swept the streets—that could scarcely touch him or the rest of them. It could only touch them if a bomb or a shell tore open their refuge.

The operation room was a few steps deeper in the earth. Three doctors took shifts at attending some eight hundred wounded. An endless band of bleeding bodies ran over the operating table day and night. For Medical Officer Huth it had not stopped for seventy days—since Otorvanovka. The difference now was that there were no more bandages, no medicine, no tetanus syringes, no anæsthetics, no morphia. The only things left were the tools, the scalpel, the saw, the scissors, a kettle of boiling water to sterilise the instruments, the strong lamp swinging overhead. Pain, unbearable pain, was the only remaining narcotic, and the doctor counted every man fortunate who lost consciousness under the scapel or the saw in his hand. Another difference was that the medical orderlies were gaunt and grey and

that they more frequently collapsed under the load of work and under the fumes they had been inhaling day and night for weeks.

"Next!"

The next was Captain Tomas.

It was a swamp, a tropical swamp, that he entered. The skeleton that motioned him to a place on the plank, and the other spectre lifting operating instruments out of a kettle of boiling water, were medical orderlies. The man with the wet, sweating body under the oil-cloth apron was the doctor. The orderlies, the doctor, the mud wall, were all sweating. The doctor stood with his feet in frothy blood. Steam rose up from the kettle. The big lamp radiated heat. No window, no chimney-hole. As Tomas laid his head on the plank-table, he caught sight of a pail. Rags of flesh, on top an amputated arm, a fine, academician's hand: with reeling senses he perceived it. The vapour of pus rose from the pail in a thick spiral. The hot breath of decay—and the lamp swinging over the doctor's head was a wild sun.

"Keep your head still, Herr Hauptmann."

The skeleton assisting the doctor pressed the captain's head between crown and chin and held it as in a vice. Captain Tomas was a simple case. The doctor trimmed the edges of the wound, cut off the dirty rags of skin from cheek and neck, then laid the used, blood-crusted bandage on the wound again.

"Next!"

An orderly took off Tomas's greatcoat and pack, led him through a large room, then through a long corridor, and showed him to a place in a smaller room.

After twenty-four hours Tomas had had enough of that room. In the silence, among the score of men crouching side by side, he could stand it no more. It was worse than the swamp, worse than the big space forward where the groaning of dying men never stopped day or night. What was the matter? This room, like the big one forward, had someone in charge, and the inmates were fed from a field-kitchen. Unlike most of the Stalingrad wounded, they got a coffee brew in the morning, a horse brew at mid-day, and in the evening a slice of bread. They did not belong to the unfed wounded; for them the thread had not been cut. Yet it was thinner here and the feeble light flickered more weakly than elsewhere. Whoever entered his cellar came

into a rustling silence—a score of men facing one another in a wide arc, and not a word spoken. It was like a reading room—there too one saw faces propped up in hands, there too was a rustling, an occasional cough. But this was no reading room; this was a cellar, and here sat sergeant-majors, captains, majors, even a lieutenant-colonel. One had a frost-bitten foot, another had inflammation of the lungs and damp hands, yet another had sciatica, others second and third degree frost-bite. They sat there in silence and heard nothing but the plaster flaking off the wall. Sometimes one man stood up, went out on stiff legs and did not return. Since Captain Tomas had been in this room, two had gone out and had not returned—a captain of flak-artillery and a staff-dispenser. When the third, a company commander, rose and went out just as stiffly and with a face as rigid as the other two, Tomas hurriedly put his things together. Greatcoat over his arm, rucksack and other things in his hand, he groped through the long corridor. He met a panzer-lieutenant of his acquaintance with both hands frost-bitten and his arms up to his elbows thickly bandaged.

"Where does Herr Hauptmann want to go?"

"I can't stand it any more in there. Is there any room where you are?"

"We'll make room." Captain Tomas moved into the big room.

The company commander mounted the mud steps and went out into the open. The sky over the centre of the town was read with the reflection of fires; but he did not look at it. Over the Heroes' Square was the zooming of propellers; he did not hear it; it no longer concerned him. He stood rigid in the snowy air, looked neither to right nor left, reached for his revolver. A shot rang out in the night and the company commander collapsed. Not far away lay the corpses of a captain of flak-artillery and a staff-dispenser. Snow fell on the field of rubble and settled on the three figures.

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Not far from the Theatre Cellar, and surrounded by the tallest house ruins in Stalingrad, was the Heroes' Square. Here too lay wounded; here too were soldiers of artillery and panzer regiments, and regimental staffs with field-kitchens, sergeant-cooks and R.S.M.s. In the square was the ruin of the great Stalingrad department-store with the

battle position of the 71st Infantry Division, where the Commander-in-Chief and his staff had taken up their quarters.

The entrances to the square were barricaded with sandbags, lamp-posts, balcony-railings, parts of machines, wrecked tanks and iron banisters, all surrounded by barbed wire. On the barbed wire hung stiff corpses with outspread arms and hands impaled on the barbs. At the other end of the big square lay a crashed German plane, and beside it a lorry mounted with strong searchlights. The flat surface of the square and the surrounding house-ruins gleamed with a chalk-white light. It was the hour of the zooming propellers in the air above; the hour of the commander of the cordon detachment, whose men, armed with rifles and machine-pistols, patrolled the square or concealed themselves behind the remains of walls.

With a roar of propellers a plane dived down from the black night sky, flung out its load and climbed steeply upwards. Again the noise of a plane, now near, now far off. A machine circled over the square, and another load came down. The loads were not dropped by parachute. Tinned meat, coca-cola, sausages, hams, bread rained on the square like stones. Not all fell on the square; some fell in neighbouring streets and alley and between ruined houses.

And there was a soldier. Who will break off one-half of the identity and draw the paybook out of the breast-pocket? Who cares if the paybook bears the name of Franz Liebich; trade or profession, clerk; place of birth, Masserburg, Thüringia; married, two children? Who will ever enter the details?—Fallen on the / /19 . . buried at. . . . Who will ever bother to read?—Actions fought: 1/9/39 to 5/9/39, West Prussia; 5/9/39, Narew crossing; 15/9/39, pursuit in East Poland; 11/5/40, Maas crossing near Maastricht; 17/5/40 to 28/5/40, pursuit battles from the Dyle to the Charleroi Canal; and finally: 22/6/41, Eastern campaign. Who cares about all that, who would enquire about it at this misty night hour on the Heroes' Square?

The general who came out of the ruins of the department-store hastened towards the Volga and then turned back—he did not look round when he heard a few rifle shots whipping across the square. The sentry who pushed the barrel of his rifle through a little gap in the barricade and was the last to see the soldier as a living creature—he

merely saw an unkempt figure in flapping greatcoat running across the square; he did not see the madness in the glittering eyes, scarcely noticed more than the coat-button over the breastbone at which he aimed. The order said: Shoot without warning. So he squeezed the trigger, and the soldier fell on his face a few yards from the loaf of bread he had tried to reach. After a while a second shot rang out on another part of the square. All this happened in Stalingrad-Central, on the Heroes' Square .

It was no different in Stalingrad-North. There, too, not far from the "White Houses," was a broad square illuminated by searchlights; there, too, were a collecting-party and a cordon detachment; there, too, the sentry with a machine-pistol did not enquire whether the soldier's name was Ewald Stüwe, nor whether his wife Mathilde Stüwe, in Cologne, spent her nights in the air-raid shelter and her days under the glaring light of a lamp in an arms factory. Neither did the sentry know or care that only a few days before, by Voroponovo, the soldier had lain in rain of shrapnel and fought at close quarters; that, wounded in the arm, he had operated a machine-gun in a battle for a farmhouse; that since then he had been wandering from dressing-station to dressing-station and spending days and nights in cellars without a bite of bread. The sentry raised his machine-pistol and fired a round. The bullets tore up the soldier's liver and kidneys, and like Franz Liebich on the Heroes' Square, in the northern ring, Ewald Stüwe collapsed in a heap on the square by the "White Houses."

The loads dropped by the transport planes did not fall only on the squares. Bread and sausages fell in the battle area, on the Russian positions, on squares between the positions, on heaps of ruins, on front and rear courtyards, on labyrinthine alleys and trampled paths. And here it was not the sentries of the cordon troops but the field-gendarmes with tin labels hanging on their chests who lay in wait. A sausage lying on the roadway could spell danger from any direction to the man who might want to pick it up: it might prove a bait and draw a Russian bullet or the eyes of a German field gendarme on to the starving man—and for him one was just as bad as the other. There, where the bread or sausages or tinned food came down in narrow alleys between bombed houses, and nocturnal shadows popped out to vanish the next moment into one

of the many holes—there was the hunting-ground of the field gendarmes. In pairs or in fours they combed the cellar-world at all hours. The profession they followed still fed its devotees. Compared with the wounded Stalingrad fighters whose faces were blackened from a hundred fights, their turn-out was smart, their carriage self-assured, their eyes bright; and what they said was significant.

What they said was: "There's one crouching there! Come on, stand up! What've you got in that box? Flour, bread, all nicely packed in cellophane, h'm! . . . Fine chest you've got, huh! Let's have a look what you've got under your tunic. A sausage, a salami—and here's another! Come on! . . . And you, my friend! In the family way? Don't gape at me, your belly I mean, what've you got stuffed in there? Come on, jump to it! Undo those buttons! Ah! There's a lovely present, not a seven months kid but half a ham! . . . Eh? Who cares if you're Corporal Reiss, panzerjäger, been an S.S. man, been in the General Government in Poland—we don't want to know that! Blood group, swimmer, racial certificate—we don't need any of it. Come on, outside! Outside, the lot of you!"

Outside, in the snowy night, there was not far to go. A second squad of field gendarmes came out of another cellar; these too had a little group of arrested men with them. One of this squad said: "Nice little party this, you ought to have seen 'em. Built up a blind wall of ammunition-boxes and grenade-boxes, they had, having a regular feast behind it, they were—coffee and all! Fine, eh? Anything's possible here."

Snow was falling from the dark sky. On one side a wooden fence, on the other the hollow window-frame of a ruined house: that was the corner the arrested men were taken to. "Looters are to be shot within twenty-four hours," said the army order. Here not twenty-four minutes had gone by. A round from machine-pistols, a few reverberating revolver-shots—and eight men lay stretched on the ground. And snow settled on the bodies of suicides, on the figures and greatcoats of "looters."

Snow fell from the sky, at first almost vertically in thick, heavy flakes. Then a wind sprang up and broke the falling crystals, driving them slantwise over the piles of ruin and stone and far out across the land.

The wind increased. With endless space behind it, it rose to a gale, howling and whipping the earth from all sides. Now it was no longer Stalingrad, no longer steppe. It was only the power of the wind—a driving, raging nothingness lashed through and through by icy needles. A weather that makes human senses useless. The Kalmuk, overtaken by such a blizzard, shuts his eyes, draws his lambskin tightly round him, no longer drives: he leaves it to his pony to find the way—and the shaggy steppe pony finds its way through the snow.

The way led through the Tsaritsa ravine. The violent gusts rattling at the walls of the ravine abated for a while, but a steady wind continued to blow along the bottom, taking the snow straight along with it. It was a valley of snow, and when eyes could be opened for seconds the snow could be seen in rising walls, in slowly rolling waves. It glittered on the sides of the ravine and overhung the steep edges as eaves overhang the walls of houses; and in angles where the wind did not penetrate it hung in garlands from point to point. But the gale rose again and broke the white garlands; and quartermaster and court-martial officer and chaplain and soldiers saw nothing more. They pressed close together; and like an ice-crusted ship this little group of men struggled on over ever-rising drifts along a white stream towards Tsaritsa-South and Stalingrad.

They were to reach shelter, though as yet they did not know what sort of shelter awaited them. In a snow-hole on the main Voroponovo-Stalingrad road they found a batch of soldiers huddled together in greatcoats, blankets, rags, hands in gauntlets, showing only faces, a nose, a pair of snow-crusted eyebrows. One man had taken off a gauntlet and was blowing on his finger-tips.

"Where does the HKL* run?" asked Chaplain Koog.

"The man continued to blow on his finger-tips. "There's no HKL now," he said.

"Isn't there?"

The man blowing on his fingers was a lieutenant.

"Practically non-existent now, Herr Pfarrer," he said. "There was a regiment there yesterday," he pointed out into the snowy waste. "Yesterday morning it was routed. What's left? A signals-detachment, a few staff clerks and a handful of infantrymen without any fighting power."

* Hauptkampflinie=main fighting line.

"And where are the staffs?"

"The corps staff's done a bunk, as far as I know. The staff of the 297th Infantry Division are still here."

"Where are they?"

"A hundred yards farther back, to the left of the road."

The sapper detachment stayed behind. Chaplain, court-martial officer, staff-quartermaster and quartermaster waded on. Some hundred yards farther, to the left of the road, they reached a bunker. And suddenly there was silence over the land. The thundering of the storm had ceased some time before. A low ground-mist drifted over the scene. By the bunker stood an armed sentry.

"Is the staff of the 297th here?"

"*Nie ponimayu!*" answered the sentry without moving a muscle.

*Nie ponimayu*: I don't understand. Chaplain, court-martial officer, staff-quartermaster and quartermaster did not understand either. The sentry raised his hand and pointed into the mist. Then they understood. And they stood there motionless, like four snowmen.

A troop was marching up, in files of three, the men wrapped in rags but precisely spaced in sections (a long unfamiliar sight), officers in front, a general at the head.

"Company . . . halt! Order . . . arms! Stand still—dress up!"

A major reported. The general returned the salute.

Something was not quite right, not clear, something not covered by drill regulations. The major turned, stood before the company: "Stand at . . . ease!" And unmilitarily, a casually spoken phrase: "Lay your rifles down in the snow."

This was done. Again: "Stand still!"

Some three hundred men—that was all that could be drummed together here. The major beckoned to the chaplain, the court-martial officer, staff-quartermaster, quartermaster. The chaplain remained standing, then turned round and walked away, and Quartermaster Schweidnitz followed him. Nobody bothered about them. Court-martial officer and staff-quartermaster took their place in front of the company, on the left of the officers. There were some three hundred men, two regimental commanders and the staff officers. The officers stood before the company.

The general strode alone over the white field. He

halted, saluted. In front of him stood a Russian officer, on his head a silver-grey lambskin cap—the commander of the 38th Russian Guards Division.

The Russian commander returned the salute. For a moment he was silent. He looked at the general, at the men on parade with their ears wrapped in rags—grey faces, frost-white noses, hunger, sickness. Suddenly there was the smell of pestilence in the air.

"Where have you your regiments, General?" asked the Russian.

"You ask me that?"

There was no need for the Russian to ask. This German division had lain opposite him by Tsybenko, by Kravtsov, by Pestchanka and again by Voroponovo. He knew what had become of the regiments of the German general.

The formalities were completed. Food, accommodation, medical attention for the wounded, were ready, the general was informed. He himself might retain his revolver, the other officers their swords. The staff officers seated themselves in a car. Staff-Quartermaster Zabel remained with the troops, who followed on foot. The way led by a few wrecked lorries, then past a little triangular coppice, back in the direction of Voroponovo.

"Three hundred men," said a soldier walking beside Zabel. "And when we went out with the division we were seventeen thousand!"

THE 279TH INFANTRY DIVISION, WITH ITS General and officers at the head, had capitulated. That happened in the southernmost part of the ring, on the territory adjacent to the town, on a snowfield by the Tsaritsa. Stragglers coming across the Tsaritsa spread the rumour. It was only one rumour among many, and it touched the other divisions and divisional staffs little more than any other rumour.

In the streets of Stalingrad the fighting went on for house-ruins and for cellars under the house-ruins. But day and night the Sign stood over Stalingrad. By night it was a fiery wedge, and by day it was dense smoke that rose

from burning houses, to be gripped by the wind and drift over the land like a black swamp.

Not all saw the Sign. Many in the Stalingrad plantation of death only saw the cellar wall and the smoke-thread rising from the warming-tin to the ceiling, or the withering face of the next man. Not all saw the Sign, but it stood over all of them. And far away from that place of fire and smoke and crumbling houses, beyond the front now fallen to the west, beyond night and powdery snow, beyond days and nights and endless retreat-roads, it was written over Germany too.

The newspapers brought out huge headlines: AN ILLUSTRIOUS EXAMPLE. MORE INTENSE FIGHTING FOR STALINGRAD IN NARROWED SPACE. INDESCRIBABLE HEROISM OF OUR SOLDIERS. ETERNAL HONOUR TO THE STALINGRAD FIGHTERS. VALIANT AND FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH. FUER FUEHRER, VOLK UND VATERLAND. SO THEY FIGHT AND SO THEY DIE, BOTH GENERAL AND GRENADIER. GERMAN COMRADESHIP IN ARMS THROUGH SUFFERING AND PRIVATION. COMRADES IN DEATH TO THE LAST BULLET. THAT GERMANY MAY LIVE. THEIR SACRIFICE IS NOT IN VAIN!

A whole nation knew how to read the headlines in the newspapers and saw the grinning mask behind the empty pathos.

. . . . .

There sat a little old mother, the unfolded newspaper on the table, spectacles slipped down to the end of her nose, gazing through the cottage window over the geranium pots and between the clean tulle curtains into the deserted village street. It was the village of Pellningken, in East Prussia, and the lonely old woman sitting with rough, work-worn hands folded on her lap was Lawkow's mother. She was thinking of her Hans, and she seemed to see him coming down the street as if at any moment he would walk in and stand before her. Steadfast and smart was her Hans. He had been in France and Poland; before Moscow he had become an officer; and before Stalingrad, when he had last written, he was battalion adjutant of the 261st. She saw her boy, small and rugged as a pine, face scarred and wrinkled like bark, but with eyes bright and

young. That was her Hans. And a tear rolled down the gaunt cheek and fell on the newspaper with the big, stirring headlines.

. . . . .

Not far from Pel'ningken, in the village of Kraupischken, was Heinrich Halluweit's little farm. Frau Wischwill and Frau Göritt had come over from Ballupönen with the unhappy tidings in the newspaper. Frau Halluweit and Frau Wischwill were not yet thirty, and only Frau Göritt had the first grey threads in her flaxen hair. Frau Halluweit's man was called Heinrich, Frau Wischwill's was Karl and Frau Göritt's was Johann. Heinrich, Karl and Johann were in the same battalion. Heinrich was a cook, and Karl and Johann were machine-gunners, in the 9th East Prussian Machine-gun Battalion. The three women sat there, scarcely touching the coffee that Frau Halluweit had made. It was like after a funeral; it was all incomprehensible; and the questions the three women asked remained unanswered. Did it have to be? Did they really *have* to go all the way to the Volga? "And what is going to happen now?" "Am I never to see Heinrich again? No, that can't be, I can't believe it!" "And Karl —have I got to carry on the farm with Poles and Russians for the rest of my life? No, if he doesn't come back I'll make an end of myself!"

. . . . .

In a villa in Berlin-Dahlem, in a quiet room shielded from the noises outside by a padded door, sat a woman. She sat on a chair near the wall, and her slim hands lay on the arm-rests. Her eyes were resting on the all too tidy and empty surface of a writing table. On it lay nothing but pens, ink and blotter, and a calendar, and under a glass a photograph of herself; a photograph of her grown-up daughter; and a framed picture of Ulm with its Minster —her husband's native town. There had been times, often late at night, when she had sat on the same chair with something or other in her hands, and, when she had looked up, had seen before her the neck and head of her husband bent over his papers, hazy in the smoke of a cigar. Now the place was empty, and to her it seemed to have been empty for a lifetime. Indeed she had spent half her life in loneliness, waiting for him to return from his wanderings. What was he really? Soldier? Diplomat? Conspirator? And on two continents.

"Of course he's still a dear, foolish boy and a reckless gambler with the highest stakes and for the very biggest prize—but not just for himself, it's not that. And now he's recklessly staked his own and my personal happiness. But if the 'winner' doesn't turn up—and there are dark omens—then it won't be only a matter of our individual fate, it will be terrible, *mein Gott!* It will affect the happiness and lives of millions of people . . ."

Frau Vilshofen—it was the wife of Colonel Vilshofen—stared unseeingly. The house, the oak-panelled walls around her, were unreal, the silence was unreal. Behind it roared a thousand guns, behind it raged the annihilation of which that ministerial official had spoken so eloquently.

Once it had all been so real. When Manfred came home after long absences, sometimes after several years, then she had lived, then sunshine was all over the house, and people were there to lunch and to dinner, never a meal without guests—she had felt that she was not in a backwater of life. Such short weeks had made up for long months of loneliness.

Then came the war. First France, then Russia. Manfred got himself transferred from the OKH to the forces. Sometimes a letter came. Nothing about events in the war in them. Landscapes, steppe, sandstorms, villages, people. He came on leave, then it was the eastern front again, and worrying silence, hardly a sign of life. Then a letter about the "great mythical stream and the crazy city"—that was the Volga and Stalingrad. Then another letter came, and this letter was a whirlwind. A whole landslide must have happened inside Manfred.

Three weeks had gone by after that; then came a brief greeting and nothing more. And to-day a telephone call from a ministry official; and here in this room she had stood opposite the official from the Ministry of Propaganda. How she came to utter the word, she did not know—it suddenly came over her. The description of funereal splendour that had been unfolded to her—she had been unable to meet it with anything but "NEIN!" She had cried: "No, I can't do that! I tell you straight away I can't take part in it!" Perhaps she had not acted rightly, for it was not only for Manfred.

"It concerns the representative act of mourning for the whole 6th Army, Gnädige Frau," the Herr Ministerialrat had answered.

"Nein, nein, nein!" she had cried. She was beside herself. She would hear nothing of mourning for an army, nor of mourning for Manfred. "He's still alive, and the army's still alive, it's perfectly obvious! And promoted to general, what does that mean if I am to mourn for him?" Perhaps I didn't do the right thing, she sobbed to herself.

"Perhaps I didn't do the right thing," she said to a white-haired old lady who had just come in—Vilshofen's mother.

"Yes, you did the right thing, Irene," said the old lady; and she sank down into a chair and hid her face in both hands. She looked up again and said: "And, *mein Gott*, this was bound to come! Under this Führer the graves are being dug for men still living. . . ."

The ministry official continued on his round. After his visit to Vilshofen's house he called on the wife of a Party official, now a lieutenant with the 3rd (Motorised) Infantry Division at Stalingrad; and from her he obtained the address of a Frau Lily Daussig in the east of Berlin. So now he had a genuine "soldier's wife" for the great mourning ceremony. Returning from his mission he learned that the Herr Minister was in the Mosaiksaal of the new Reichskanzlei. There he found him surrounded by a swarm of decorators, superintending the hanging of the black satin, the mourning banners, the setting up of the candelabra, the mounting of the symbolic catafalque for the 6th Army.

The Propaganda Minister listened with only half an ear to the official's report. He was busy running round like a rotation machine. Meetings, press conferences, talks with feuilletonists, reporters, photographers, artists—biographies of army leaders, of officers, of soldiers of the 6th Army, examples of heroic death, last words, legacies to the nation—all these had to be thought up, planned, inspired, written *en masse*.

He had to multiply himself, excel himself. Unlike the times of Party crises, this time it was not a matter of an S.S. man Hornick or an S.S. man Stampfer to be accused in the grave of every possible hatred and rage against the world. This time, in the mounting crisis of the Nazi Reich, the huge black belly of the catafalque was to symbolise the corpse of a whole army, of twenty-four generals, ten thousand officers, three hundred thousand men. And it

would be a "grand corpse"—it had all been arranged. The Commander-in-Chief would be promoted to Field-Marshal and Colonels to Generals. And Knight's Crosses, Oak Leaves and Iron Crosses, Class I and Class II, would be distributed by the hundred.

But die they must, from Field-Marshal to the last man! And perhaps that had not been quite so hunded-per-cent. efficiently arranged. The distant effect was not enough, and the few who had flown in were a poor help. All must die. A corpse must really be a corpse. You can't make political capital out of half a corpse. Every man who finds a hole to slip out of works against the plan, against the gigantic screwing up of the whole nation to the highest pitch—and the higher the rank the more so. Die they must. All of them. With heavy cares on his brow the Propaganda Minister limped through the Mosaiksaal.

A whole nation—mothers, wives, children—groaned under a propaganda that took all hope from them and for days made them *see* husbands, sons, fathers, dying. They still lived; and it was against all decency to call the undertaker into the house while the "corpse" still writhed on its deathbed. But that is precisely what the Nazi propaganda did to the Stalingrad fighters and their families.

The men still lived! The army was split in two. The smaller part was in Stalingrad-North; the larger part was concentrated in Stalingrad-Central Some ten thousand men lay in the Theatre Cellar and in the underground labyrinths around the Heroes' Square. Some five thousand had found refuge in the ruins of the People's Home Commissariat; thousands of others under the ruins of a corn storehouse, a cold storage, a barracks, under ruins round the railway station; thousands more in groups of hundreds in dozens of other places. And across the airfield on the road to Gumrak, and farther south right across country—where some were taken prisoner and others got through—and through fields of rubble, through the maze of streets, through the countless alleys cutting through the town, still came wounded men, stragglers, the last remnants of regiments, seeking here, two thousand kilometres from their native land, a hole to crawl into and in which, if it must be, to die.

The men still lived and moved! The flak-commander, Major Buchner, was still looking for his Lieutenant

Stampfer, who had vanished wtih the baggage column. The battalion-adjutant of the 261st Grenadier Regiment, little Lieutenant Lawkow, the stump of his arm bandaged close to his body, had reached the flying-school and was slowly groping his way to Stalingrad town, though his compatriots of the 9th Machine-gun Battalion, under Heinrich Halluweit, Karl Wischwill and Johann Göritt, had been trampled into the snow by tanks beyond the Tartar Wall. Private Franz Widomec from Bottrop was one of a long procession of wounded men behind Chief Staff-M.O. Simmering.

Chief Staff-M.O. Simmering had returned from home-leave in November to the Stalingrad front. He had arrived at Vertyatchi four days late. And what he had observed during the hours of waiting at every little station had made clear to him a few things concerning his own medical unit and the situation on the whole northern bolt position on the Stalingrad front.

On the front ammunition stocks had never been adequate. The transport of ammunition had been given priority over food and other supplies. And both had priority over the transport of wounded to the rear. At Tchir the track had not been freed at all for ambulance trains. Slightly wounded and seriously wounded (no distinction was made) were sent in empty goods-trains to Tchir and into the Donetz area. He obtained an idea of what that meant when he saw the tracks of every little station blocked with troop trains, with open trucks loaded with tanks, guns, motors, spare parts, with ammunition and goods transports, and amidst them a train of goods-wagons with a freight of wounded that waited for hours, sometimes a full twenty-four hours, before rolling on to the next station. That was in November, and the wagons that arrived with goods were without heating and used only on their empty runs to help transport the wounded—that at a time when the earth was already frozen hard and the thermometer showed 10 to 15 degrees C. below zero. How many dead, how many cripples, how many men with hands and feet lost by frost-bite had this method of transporting wounded to the rear cost the German nation! It was then that the thought first came to Chief Staff-M.O. Simmering of the gigantic and irresponsible wastage of men that was going on. And this was before the encirclement, it was in the course of normal development, and was but a dim

portent of the ghastly fate that awaited the wounded after the closing of the ring.

Chief Staff-M.O. Simmering was leading a long procession of wounded. He marched so slowly that the wounded and the sick were able to follow. His feet were in felt boots. Many of those following him had nothing but rags wrapped round their feet. He did not look round and did not see those who fell by the wayside, nor how the long procession behind him, with the sledges carrying the meagre food supplies, was steadily growing shorter. Whoever sat down in the snow had to be left behind. Nothing could be done, and Simmering left it to his sergeant-major and sergeants to take any last messages from those who could go no farther. To remain with the column, to march at the head of it as Chief Staff-M.O., to give a little hope to those with any spirit left—that was all he could do.

But what sort of hope did he mean, and where was he leading them? He had come from Gumrak; he had behind him men from the hospitals by Gumrak. At the Tartar Wall he had run into fire from tanks and had to turn south. And now, after a night in dugouts, he was on the march again. The heap of stones towering at the edge of the snowfield, the tattered gables, the chimneys, the house-fronts with empty window-holes and nothing but air behind them: that was Stalingrad.

Where was he leading them? To the Town Command: that was the army order that had reached him. The remnants of medical units and the mass of the wounded streaming into Stalingrad were to be assembled and treated in the building of Town Command Central.

"Assembled and treated." The order was there on the paper. But, *mein Gott*, after a trail of seventy days, Vertyatchi, Baburkin, Bolshaya Rossoshka, Gumrak, and what had happened there to "assembled and treated" men, would it not be more humane to halt here in front of the town of ruins and scatter the men to the four winds on the broad snowfield?

But a Chief Staff-M.O. does not scatter; he assembles and arranges if he can do nothing more, and he sets up a procession and leads.

Where to? To the Town Command: that was the army's answer. It was also the answer of the Chief Staff-M.O. But the *man* under the uniform greatcoat

asked further: Where to? That remained the question of conscience.

The sky was bright, the air so cold that little bubbles of crystal formed in the nose and the dampness from watering eyes froze instantly to ice. The sky was high and bright, the sun was shining. The Stalingrad town boundary came nearer; already the canyon of stone was opening up through which he would lead his procession.

Chief Staff-M.O. Simmering, striding over the snow that glittered in the sunlight, the road to Stalingrad near, drawing after him two or three hundred wounded, sick, dying men like a brown snail-slime, suddenly wrenched himself from an almost overwhelming impulse and sought refuge in a fierce, cleansing act of reasonable and objective consideration.

How did it come about, this disorganisation in the feeding and transport of the wounded? First: the order to take them to the rear in empty goods-trains that were subjected to continual long delays. The consequence was that when the encirclement was complete, tens of thousands of wounded men lay in the dressing-stations in and around Stalingrad awaiting transport.

Secondly: in the panicky retreat the medical appliances were left behind on the other side of the Don. Only remnants of the medical companies escaped across the Don. The slightly wounded from the villages of the Golubaya valley and from the whole eastern part of the Don bend, who came in long streams on foot and in all available vehicles across the river, crowded the already overburdened medical stations to many times their capacity.

Thirdly: it had not been possible to obtain enough fuel when it became imperative to move the medical stations farther back, so that, when the western front of the ring was pressed in, medical appliances, bandages, tents, field-kitchens and food stores were abandoned, and the walking wounded, striving to retreat again, overcrowded the now insufficiently supplied and improvised medical stations to many times their capacity.

Fourthly: an army order forbade wounded to be allowed to fall into the hands of the enemy. The consequence of this order was roads full of frozen corpses and columns of marooned lorries full of frozen wounded; and a further consequence was a new wave of walking wounded who

now flooded into the medical stations and found neither accommodation, food nor help.

Fifthly: from the beginning, and still more as time went on, transport to the airfield had been restricted by shortage of fuel. From the beginning the air transport had been inadequate and became ever more so, because many transport planes never reached the airfield, many were prevented by bad weather or by fierce anti-aircraft fire from landing, and those that did land stayed only a very short time on the airfield. Thus flying out, the only hope for the wounded became more and more a false hope—a will-o'-the-wisp in the huge swamp.

Sixthly—but first, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth factors were all confused together; and in the face of this chaos methodical consideration was no longer possible. Only single images rose in the Chief Staff-M.O.'s consciousness, spectral faces like bubbles rising and bursting out of the swamp through which he had been wading for seventy days.

After the evacuation of Vertyatchi, at Baburkin, in a ravine of snowdrifts, there stood a tent. Around the tent wounded lay on the bare snow. In the unheated tent were three operating tables, a Chief Staff-M.O., a Staff-M.O. and a senior M.O. The surgeon's fingers were stiff with cold. The contents of the phials were frozen. The feverish body on the table was like an oven. Fumes rose from the wound as from a wash-tub. The Staff-M.O.'s spectacles clouded over. The senior M.O.'s eyes were watering. How was one to operate there? And what would become of the man brought in from the snow and laid out there again? Those that had lost much blood would die quickly. Those that had lost little blood would die slowly. A few would survive—that would depend not so much on blood but on mysterious forces. And next day they would be laid in the earth bunkers hurriedly dug by the slightly wounded, by medical orderlies, by Russian prisoners, by all available hands. There they would have to feed mainly on their bodily reserves, to be left there on the next withdrawal—to remain where they lay, or to be washed up again with the next wave at the new medical station.

The next station was Bolshaya Rossoshka.

There they were, those that had been driven on again, their bodily and spiritual reserves exhausted. They no longer hoped; they no longer looked up again at the

mention of Hooth and Manstein. The Führer's words, that their sufferings would turn into the greatest victory in history (eyes still lit up at that in Baburkin), touched them no more; they believed and hoped no more. This hopeless flotsam from abandoned medical stations was joined by other hopeless men from the front: a few of them wounded, some suffering from frost-bite, most of them exhausted, starving men no longer feeling hunger, without interest in their own fate.

On the dissecting table lay a soldier's corpse which told the story of all the others. The corpse was 1 metre 80 cm. long. Weight 6 stone. Tissue dried up. A search failed to find a trace of fat.

That corpse was a sign. Chief Staff-M.O. Simmering knew how to read it. And because of it he clung all the more tenaciously to the Führer's promise, himself believed in the "hammering out," in the relief army; drove his drivers, stablemen, Russian prisoners (on a crust of bread and a thin horse-soup) to build bunkers from sunrise to sunset. Once more he produced heated accommodation—for a few hundred wounded. But some thousand wounded, and daily more crowds of them, had to pass on without help. And the next wave came and went over the Rossoshka valley and past the next new dressing-station.

Farther back the ring grew smaller. Countless men dying. Yet ever more wounded, sick, dying men. As the ring shrank the doomed men drew back concentrically, and all roads led to Gumrak. The railway station was the field-hospital; the goods-wagons, one behind another and track by track, were the "wards." In the station-house, in the hall, under the roofs they lay side by side and one over another; and day and night at the doors and windows were the faces of those seeking entry.

And there was the sign again. With his last strength a man raised his arms, frozen stiff as wood, implored: "Only a little warmth!" He fell on his face and the arms broke like glass.

There were signs, there were faces; daily, hourly, they rose, faded, came again. Whoever saw them could read them. There was also the changed army order. At Vertyatchi, at Baburkin, it was forbidden to allow wounded to fall into enemy hands. When the ring by Gumrak was pressed in and the masses of sick and wounded flowed off to Stalingrad and began to beat on

the walls of Headquarters, it was permitted to leave wounded behind; but to leave medical-corps personnel behind was forbidden. For the seriously wounded to be left without attendance, with no one to heat the stoves, was a death-sentence; and in Gumrak the Russians (they must be there by now) were to find a station building and some hundred and twenty wagons filled with frozen soldier corpses.

The army order for Gumrak was no sign—it was the revelation of a ghastly intention. The men who had sacrificed their blood and their good limbs must not be allowed to show their blackened amputation stumps and their horror-marked faces in the streets of Germany. The back door into life (a white flag on the abandoned dressing-stations) must be closed to them. All must die!

This was a truth that the doctor would not acknowledge. Like a stone, like a foreign body in the organism, he knew how to cover it, isolate it; he would not admit its existence. A helper, a healer, a resurrector, on his shoulder-strap the Æsculapian staff with the snake on a field of cornflowers in a silver frame, he organised the unstemmed stream of death, had been doing it for seventy days in obedience to the order. Thus the order (of Army H.Q., of the OKH, of the Führer's Headquarters) had made the doctor a grave-digger.

The snow glittered in the sunlight. The shadow of a cloud lay over the field. Here and there smoke was welling up over the town. Shooting could be heard. Far behind lay Gumrak. In front lay Stalingrad Town Command. What would Town Command bring? Chief Staff-M.O. Simmering bore the truth within him like a stone. Snow around; in front the heap of stones that was the goal—that for a whole summer and now throughout the winter had been the goal. The goal had changed, had fallen in ruins as the image in his heart had fallen in ruins. The doctor stood still. He let the procession catch up and the weary rows pass by. Scarcely a man raised his eyes. They thought no more, dreamed, dozed as they went along. Their feet were invisible as their long greatcoats dragged in the snow. Unimaginably slowly they advanced. The procession resembled a barque with no wind in the sails, drifting on a sluggish, invisible current.

The doctor's eyes rested on the face of a soldier, one of the few that still looked up and showed some interest in

their surroundings. The doctor recollected that the man had been one of the last in the endless band running over his operating-table at Gumrak. He had three broken ribs and an injured shoulder-blade. Walking was difficult for him; he groped and stumbled with every step, and every step wrung sweat from his brow that froze on the unshaven face. The doctor joined the procession and walked along beside the soldier.

The conversation took a turn that was rather surprising for the doctor. Three ribs and a shoulder-blade: he'd got off cheaply at that, said Private Widomec. And he thought that with these ribs he had made something like a part payment of some debt. For what?

"For the war and all the misery we've brought to this country."

"Give me a concrete example," said the doctor.

"Well, for instance, once there was an old half-starved Russian woman. I was one of those that ate up her last potatoes after she'd cooked them in their skins."

The doctor thought: "Strange! Here's a man who shouldn't be on his feet at all; he stumbles fifteen kilometres across country and thinks he's got off cheaply."

"But it's not only those potatoes, Herr Oberstabsarzt."

"Have you had these ideas in your head long?"

"I first thought of such things in Vienna."

"In Vienna?"

"Yes, there're so many foreigners there now—Greeks, Yugoslavs, Ukranians, working for starvation wages. Starving in the gutter among us. You see them on Sundays in the streets, begging for bread. So many poor, foreign, starving people, with weary eyes. When I saw them I thought"—the eyes of Private Widomec swept over the wretched figures in the procession of wounded—"some day this misery will come over us too. . . ."

"Strange!" thought the doctor again. Up to now he had heard no such candid speech, nor any expression of such thoughts.

"Earlier on we thought everything would soon be forgotten after the war," said the soldier. "But it won't be, no, it won't be. We shall have to face up to that, Herr Oberstabsarzt."

"Yes, I suppose we'll have to."

Chief Staff-M.O. Simmering went forward again and resumed his place at the head of the procession. "Of all

of them," he thought, "the one who analyses things and thinks them over and decides what attitude to adopt—a man like that still holds his head up and sees a bit of future before him, while others collapse like ashes. The cause of the rapid spiritual decay is evidently not merely lack of fat, there's something else lacking too!"

The procession had now penetrated into the town and was passing through houses, across courtyards and across rubble. The streets had to be avoided; many were under enemy fire. Bright though the sky had been outside, here among the ruins and through the streets a mist was rising from the Volga. The air was filled with smoke and the smell of burning. It was impossible to tell exactly where the shooting was; it seemed to be in front and behind and from all sides. A ditch offered some cover. When the ground sloped up out of the ditch again Chief Staff-M.O. Simmering found the building of the Town Command before him. It was a large house with three wings running to the rear; and though it had no windows left, only wide broken window-holes, it was yet one of the least damaged house-ruins in Stalingrad.

. . . . .

Unlike the procession of wounded that had approached the town indirectly in a wide arc from the south, little Lieutenant Lawkow had reached the town boundary in a straight line from the west. Two thousand metres of house-stumps, rubble, factory-chimneys towering like the masts of a ship, fountains of fire from Russian mortars and (to judge from their position) the fire of German flak guns, separated him from the huge grey building of Town Command, from medical attendance and from a horse-soup that he hoped to get there.

"It looks pretty grim. But one must go through with it. Not every bullet finds its mark, they say. And a man's such a little speck of dust that there just isn't enough powder and metal to cover every single one. One man gets hit and another goes on." Lawkow had learned that again on the way here from the Tulevoi ravine.

He lay in the snow and took stock of the situation. He tried to ascertain what the objective of the firing was, in order to be able to plan his route accordingly. He had learned that man is but dust and can ordain nothing in advance, can only chance his luck. So, as transport was not to be counted on, he had set off from the Tulevoi

ravine on foot. Gumrak was one big hospital, and in Gumrak at the latest he would get medical aid—so he had reckoned. He was right: it was one big hospital. But he was only able to see it from outside and over the shoulders of the men crowding round the station-building. All he managed to do was to press his nose against a window-pane and cast a look into the interior, where the patients lay on top of one another, but where there was at least a stove at which they could thaw their bones. But what was he to do? His shattered arm ached up to his neck; neck and head seemed to be seized by the fire that rose from the arm. What cunning ruse could he employ to get into this wonderful hospital while there was still time for the doctor to do something? The Russian artillery and the sudden run to the east solved the problem. He ran too, or rather stumbled, direction Gorodishtche; and it was not his arm—he no longer felt it—but his neck and head that were the immense weight that he had to carry along. In Gorodishtche everything was perfectly simple. There was the street, and rolling down the street were flak-guns, lorries laden with officers' luggage ("and *mein Gott!* I threw my suitcase away by the Kazatchi Hills! "), and not a place to be had on one of these confounded lorries; there marched groups of men, with and without weapons; and suddenly there stood a general at the roadside, his lower lip thrust forward, sadly shaking his head as he watched the motley hordes go by. It was Lawkow's general, the Commander of the 113th Infantry Division.

"Hallo, what's up with you, Lawkow? " he asked.

"*Jawohl*, Herr General, they've made a nasty mess of this arm."

"Had medical attention? "

"No, Herr General, I've been trying to find a dressing-station since Tulevoi."

"Well, you go into that bunker and report to our Divisional M.O."

"*Jawohl*, Herr General. But may I ask a question? Can Herr General tell me what's going to happen now? "

But the General only dismissed him with a gesture of his hand and stared dully at a panting, heavily-laden truck, at the limping men, at the whole hotch-potch of the Napoleonic retreat passing by.

That was Gorodishtche. And though after that the arm

was right off, Lawkow felt better with a decent bandage on, and his head was freer, not like a huge balloon on his shoulders.

The next stage was the Tartar Wall—and Russian tanks rolling over a battalion. The "speck of dust," Lawkow, climbed over the Wall and wandered over the airfield as if it were a peaceful ski-ing ground. There the commander of an artillery detachment gave him a breakfast that really *was* a breakfast, consisting of slices of first-class sausage and bread and butter; and afterwards Lawkow had a good sleep.

Next day the airfield again—but this time it was no peaceful ski-ing ground but a very uncomfortable hunting-ground for Russian tanks. Then a hill, another hill, and a little wood. Wherever one looked there was trouble; but again one realised that one was but a speck of dust. But like a "speck" borne on a wave of good luck Lawkow came over the Tartar Wall. Then everything was mixed up together—lorries again with luggage, a baggage column, abandoned 2 cm. flak guns, limping crowds; heavy Russian tanks, too, rolling away over lorries and luggage, over a crowd of yelling men, and cutting off the retreat of other crowds. Five, six tanks on the wide snowfield. The turrets opened, and on Tank One a Russian officer popped up, and on Tank Two and on Tank Three; and on the snow under the tall sky the tanks seemed like fishing boats with the trawl nets slung out.

The Russian officer on Tank One waved his machine-pistol, pointed to the rear and roared his long-drawn-out "*Davai! Davai!*" That probably meant: "It's high time now, and at the double, please!" Those who had feet used them and ran for dear life. But the "speck of dust," Lawkow, found himself on the border-line of this great fishing expedition and remained outside the ever-dwindling circle of running, panting creatures. Of course he was running and panting too, but he ran in the opposite direction. Right and left the tank-shells were bursting in the snow, and more than one man fell and did not rise again. But the "speck of dust" reached first a tower standing there like a tin soldier, then took cover under a pile of ruins, and finally got to the door of a bunker—in fact, to the doors of a number of bunkers. They were packing up here and—he could hardly believe it—they had their own cook and hairdresser and hair-cream and rubber

bath-tub. One would have thought it was the Field-Marshal in person, but it was only a regimental commander and a regimental staff, the staff of the 100th Jäger Regiment. But one must admit the gentlemen had a nerve—there was a whole park of lorries, and more suitcases, wireless sets, the Ia's things, documents. There was petrol for them all here; and out there by the Tartar Wall lay the flak-guns, which should have been used against the tanks, thrown away without fuel! Anyway, here was a move, and if Lawkow hadn't sat on the wrong spot, that is, on the truck with the documents, which was finally left behind, he would have ridden grandly into Stalingrad. But he was unlucky and had to get off the truck again. Still, one learns after a while how to put up in an evacuated bunker, at least for a while. And that is what he did until next day, when he woke up and crept along a bit farther—in fact to this spot. And there he lay in a snow hollow, weighing up the situation. It was now a case of getting on to Town Command. Doubtless that would be the final goal, for two thousand metres farther on was the Volga; and though it was frozen over and the ice held, as things were neither he nor anybody else had any business there now.

Lawkow had thoroughly surveyed the territory and observed where the mortar-bombs were landing and where the rifle-fire lay. What was going on, what it was all about, he could not puzzle out. He set out on his way, and after some five hundred paces rounded a ruin and reached a narrow street. But for a few minutes hell was loose in this short street. The Russians were shooting and the Germans were shooting, and it seemed as if both sides meant it for him personally. Where the mortar-bombs landed there seemed to be thick red heads standing in the mist. Fling oneself down, of course fling oneself down—but no, everything was upside down and this time the wrong thing was the right thing. He ran, took three long spurts, into the ruin; inside was nothing but walls, with the milky sky above and the first pale star. But no, that was not all. He heard groaning, and there lay a man in the rubble. Lawkow approached—perhaps he could find out what the objective was that they were fighting for, and which way he must go. But when he saw the man's face he realised that he would find out nothing here. The muddy hand that rose was as paper-white under the dirt

as the face. The hand-movement was an entreaty. Lowkow bent down, gripped the man's greatcoat and raised him up, but at once let him fall back. Both legs were putty and one lay across the other, with foot and boot turned outwards. Only after he had seen this did he notice the expression: now, obviously, the man understood everything. Lawkow heard the feeble voice.

"Kamerad, if you get through. . . ."

"Yes, if I get through, of course, if there's anything I can do."

The other had a bit of paper in his hand and was scrawling something on it. The hand fell back, and Lawkow had to pick up the scrap of paper at the side of the unconscious man. He stuck it in his pocket and, since it was now quiet outside, he ran on. He had covered half the distance to Town Command and was already in sight of the big grey corner-house. There was still an open space to cross, and he wanted to spy it out first. He sat behind a heap of stone, took the piece of paper out of his pocket, held it close to his eyes and read: "Dear Luise, I'm done for, my last thought is of you, don't forget me. . . ."

"But, *mein Gott*, who is this Luise, where does she live? Too idiotic, I ought to have asked him, taken off his identity disc. Well, after all, perhaps it doesn't matter. . . . But perhaps it does matter—and if I do get through—I promised him!"

In front, on the square, it was quiet; behind there was again a flickering. Lawkow fought with himself. "You're a bloody fool! And if you finish up on your face it serves you right! Anyway I've discovered a way that goes right through the houses."

So he argued with himself for and against the trip back. Finally he stood up, turned round, went back the same way through the houses and returned to the ruin. It was now almost dark, and a second dead man lay in the rubble. He found the right one, and as he took off the identity disc the dead man's eyes seemed to sparkle with satisfaction. Lawkow closed the half-open eyelids; the two of them were old acquaintances now. Well, that was that!

But now there was such a flickering along the way he had come that it seemed advisable to stay awhile behind these thick walls. He drew back farther into the ruin,

caught sight of a hole and a few trampled steps, went down, and there found three men crouching together.

"Hallo, you've got nicely out of the way, haven't you?"

"We have! They're crazy. We've finished with the bloody lunacy!"

Lawkow would not encourage this tone. "What's going on? Are the Russians here or are we?"

"Nobody knows. We're making a counter-attack now."

"A counter-attack, eh? And who are 'we'?"

"Our division—I mean the cook and the clerk. And the general's slung a rifle on too. He's lying somewhere in a snow-hole."

"For his sake we'll carry on with the 'bloody lunacy'."

"Why for his sake?"

"He can't stick it out in a cellar any longer, so they all follow him."

"No, it's not like that. He went to the corps commander at mid-day, and when he came back the how-d'you-do started. He's got the order for it."

Lawkow learned that the commanding general of Eighth Army Corps lay in a balka close by; that not far away, under the ruins of an airmen's and sappers' barracks, lay the last remnants of an infantry division; that a few hundred metres farther on, under a pile of ruins (which he had passed by), lay the remains of another unit; and that both commanders, after a visit to the commanding general, had begun a so-called counter-attack. The division to which the three men belonged, with cook, R.-S.-M., divisional vet. and clerks—the general had issued rifles to all—still consisted of eighty men. What could they attack? What line, if they ever reached one, could they occupy? There was nothing left for them to do but crawl back to their cellar-holes. What was being done here by these ghostly remains of a division, with whatever weapons they had left, could scarcely be taken seriously from a military standpoint. But for the man out there with legs of putty, for the Luise waiting for him, and for many another, it was a very serious matter.

Meanwhile the counter-attack, or whatever it was, pushed on over the street along which Lawkow had to go and cleared it for half an hour or so; and, apart from stray rifle bullets that knocked plaster from the walls, he was finally able to reach Town Command unhindered.

But here Lawkow ran into serious trouble. He found

something he had not seen either in the Kazatchi Hills, or in the Tulevoi ravine, or at Gumrak.

. . . . .

Another man came the same way as Lawkow; but he had done the trip two or three times. This was Major Buchner.

Major Buchner's wanderings during the last days of Stalingrad had begun at Voroponovo. There, when Pitomnik fell and the Russians pressed against the loop railway, he had had to set up his heavy flak on the railway track. In vain he had hung on to the telephone, called the Panzer Corps, the Ia, the Chief: "Are you crazy? Flak in the middle of a railway track!"

"That's the order: the flak stays there. The flak is the moral support of the infantry."

The flak stayed there. As a result it was shot off by mortar-bombs without itself having fired a shot. The infantry—Döllwang's group—had neither moral nor material support and was chased across the railway; the flak-detachment was routed, partly set up again near Yeshovka, and again at Gumrak, behind picked-up guns, and there finally shot up. In a little wood by Stalingradski Major Buchner collected the remnants. A hundred and twenty men left, two supply-trucks, and he himself with an armoured car—an old crock, though the wheels still turned.

What was there to do? The batteries shot up; the general flown out—and while one was still floundering around he croaked the swan-song: "Set up new flak division!" On the southern edge of the ring they were already capitulating. Stalingrad was nothing but a mill —bones or guns, it was all the same, all was grist to be ground without sense or purpose; all that mattered was the final product, the little pieces! What was there to do? Put the men in as infantry? No! After all, Stampfer was once a student and hadn't yet finished his studies; Minz was a drainage-superintendent; Buchner himself was once a chemist, had his knowledge of the textile trade and was a bloody fool anyway to leave South America and come into this uncertain Hitler business. Beneath the uniform they were all something else besides flak soldiers; somewhere they all had a broken thread to take up again.

"Right! Lieutenant Stampfer, you'll take over the two supply-trucks and off to Stalingrad! Meeting-place, the

'White Houses.' And there we'll have a rest and try to get a proper estimate of the situation."

So began the dispersal and the endless wandering. So far as Buchner was concerned it was first in the old crock and, when fuel ran out, on foot: first through mist and blizzard and then through clear air and biting cold. The hundred and twenty men reached the "White Houses" safely and took up quarters there. But Lieutenant Stampfer with the supply trucks had vanished. Then began a search up and down Stalingrad.

"Have you seen any flak vehicles?"

"No."

"You know my Lieutenant Stampfer, don't you?"

"Haven't seen him."

The troops were waiting in a cellar, starving. Telephone call to an infantry regiment. "No, can't let you have any food. Give me your men, then they'll get something to eat."

Thus the infantry commander got the flak men—a hundred and twenty men for a hundred and twenty half-loaves. And the search for Stampfer went on. Out went Buchner again with his adjutant Loose. The scent was lost at the "flower-pot." Back to Stalingrad and again back to the "flower-pot." The first time the "flower-pot" lay there peacefully in a thick mist. The second time it was bright sunshine, and the "flower-pot" was no longer there: nothing but smoking heaps and corpses, and soldiers wading through the snow with hands up, in the midst of them a fluttering white rag. At the Tartar Wall was a bunker of wounded: "Take us with you! Take us with you!" How to take them—without a car and with feet that were almost finished? How to take them—a whole bunker full of men who could not stand up? As Buchner and Loose turned and left them, the men wept.

This weeping of grown men accompanied Major Buchner as he wandered under the tall starry sky across the deserted airfield. Loose at his side was silent and so exhausted that he lagged a few paces behind. They wanted to reach their regimental battle-position. The drivers' coats that they wore were so heavy and so long that they continually trod on the ends. Dog-tired, they could scarcely go on. They found another bunker. Buchner could stand no more weeping, so he let Loose go down

into it. Loose soon came out again, gripped Buchner's sleeve, pulled him away from the bunker.

"There're Russians in there asleep!"

Half an hour later they saw some eighty men crossing the field in single file. Germans? Russians? One man was limping behind; they approached him.

"What lot are you?"

The man answered in French. He had taken *them* for Russians! It was a construction-troop on the way to Stalingrad-Central.

Finally they reached the regimental battle-position. The day before they had found the whole staff there, including the commander, who could not grasp the fact that Gumrak was already in the hands of the Russians. Now the place was deserted, the bunkers empty. Only litter, empty boxes, meat-tins and documents lay around.

The day before Buchner should have taken an assignment here. "Glad you've come, Buchner. I've got an assignment for you."

"I'm not taking on any assignment, Herr Oberst. I'm too done up. I've got to sleep first."

After a sleep the assignment again. "I can't take on any assignment, Herr Oberst. I've got to collect my men, then I've got to find Lieutenant Stampfer with the supply-trucks."

That was the day before. Now all was abandoned and empty.

Suddenly three men popped up out of one of the bunkers. They were men of Buchner's own detachment; they reported that another twenty-four men were in a cellar in Stalingrad-Central. They also had news of Stampfer. Stampfer killed, the supply-trucks shot up.

That meant the end of the detachment. Buchner could do nothing more for the 120 men handed over to the infantry. Without supplies and food he could never get them back. Now he had three men out of his eight hundred, and he wanted to collect the twenty-four men in Stalingrad.

On the way there, still outside Stalingrad, they noticed a fire flickering in a cellar by the roadside. In the cellar they found some men crouching over the fire, warming themselves. Major, adjutant and the three men joined them and dozed for an hour. Ahead there was so much shooting in the maze of streets that they had later to grope

their way from wall to wall. In doing so the adjutant, Lieutenant Loose, fell down. It did not look very serious.

"What's up, Loose?"

"My leg, Herr Major."

They helped him to his feet, but down he went again. He could no longer walk. They dragged him back to the cellar. It was serious after all, a shrapnel wound, and the leg looked bad. They still had two field-dressings, but with the size of the wound these were of little use and a shirt was wrapped round the leg as well. A stretcher was constructed, and Lieutenant Loose was taken to Town Command, where wounded were assembled and treated. On the way they found the twenty-four men in the cellar indicated, and took them along. With twenty-seven men, and Lieutenant Loose on the stretcher, they arrived at Town Command. Buchner, Loose and the two men carrying the stretcher went inside. Presently Buchner came out without Loose and took his place silently at the head of his men.

There was still shooting. Buchner neither hastened nor slowed his steps; he was utterly indifferent. For this, for this . . . went round and round in his head. For this the march from Kharkhov across the Mius and the Don, for this the massacre by Verchnaya Businovka, for this Hill 12, for this the Kazatchi Hills, for this the collapse on the railway-track by Voroponovo—for such an end, for such a Town Command, for such an unbelievable thing! He ought not to have left Loose there! Loose could have died just as well out here, and there would have been someone to hold his hand.

At last he halted before a house entrance.

"Right; in here, it's all the same. First a kip and then maybe something to eat. The men have had nothing for three days. They're finished, only the mud on their uniforms and their stiff frozen greatcoats are holding them up. I'll report to H.Q. in the morning: Major Buchner with 27 men. The remains of a flak detachment, perhaps the remains of a whole flak division. I beg to be allotted some task, and above all to be led to a feeding-trough, no matter if it's only fit for pigs. I can't leave the men without bread, without anything, I can't just leave them to starve. Not for that Mius, Don, Verchnaya, Businovka, Kazatchi! Poor Loose, I ought not to have left him there! A comrade one's so often been in the muck with, one

doesn't leave in a place like that. We'll go to H.Q. in the morning; let's have a good sleep first!

"In here then—what is this place? A steam-mill, the steam-mill of the 71st Infantry Division. The 71st Infantry Division had a dairy and its own poultry farm—that was in the balka by 'Hartmannsdorf,' but they've lost it now—and they've got their own steam-mill. Right, into the mill!"

A sergeant-major stood there. "Hop it, lads, they'll shoot the roof down on top of us as it is!"

There was something in what he said, for there was the flash of bombs and artillery salvos. Buchner realised that he was standing in the dark courtyard; that before him was a sergeant-major, and around him were his twenty-seven hungry mouths. What did the fellow mean, "hop it?"

"What do you mean, Sergeant-Major? We need food and accommodation!"

"*Zu Befehl*, Herr Major. There's nothing here, neither accommodation nor food."

The sergeant-major was well upholstered; under the tunic he had a regular corporation for such a time. A broad, rosy face and full cheeks, Buchner noticed in the flash of the artillery; while around there was a hissing like bursting steam-boilers.

Buchner roared above the hissing: "About turn, quick march, Sergeant-Major! Let's see what you've got here!"

With this roar, which suddenly overcame him, he almost exhausted his strength. He was tired and his shoulders ached; he could scarcely drag himself forward. And he could not get Loose and Town Command out of his head. No, one really ought to fetch him out again. A man with whom he had shared his last crust of bread. . . .

In the courtyard was the mill-house, then came another large room and beyond it a small one. The large room was overcrowded, as the sergeant-major had said. The small one was occupied by the sergeant-major, a lance-corporal and two millers.

Buchner had a miller awakened. He, too, looked as well fed as a mouse in a granary.

"Come on, miller, give us some flour! A ration for twenty-seven men. Understand?"

"But, Herr Major, first I must have the authority of the Division."

"Nonsense! What else have you got?"

"Only the unground wheat."

"That's a lie!"

"Well, a few sweepings."

"But, Herr Major, the commissariat officer——"

"Don't worry, Sergeant-Major, he won't show himself here again. Where d'you think the Russians are? They'll very soon be calling on you!"

"We can't issue flour without an authority from the commissariat officer. . . ."

*Mein Gott*, if only he weren't so tired, if only his bones and his head were not like lead, if only he could think of something! Suddenly he remembered the packet of cigarettes he still possessed. He pulled it out of his pocket.

"Here are some cigarettes. Now give us some flour!"

"I mustn't, Herr Major. It's against regulations. But I've got a bit of my own I've saved."

"Good, we'll have yours!"

The miller took the cigarettes, got up and vanished into a corner. He came out with one solitary kilo of flour. One kilo of flour for twenty-seven men! He stammered: "Herr Major, this is my last. There have been so many people here."

Buchner felt like clouting him knocking him down. But he was done in, finished. And anyhow it was all the same.

"We've got to perish, flour or no flour. The Russians will be here to-morrow."

He took the kilogramme of flour and entrusted it to his sergeant, Januschek. Let him see what he could make of it for twenty-seven men. Buchner himself went to have a look at the large room.

This room was indeed overcrowded. "Overcrowded" is hardly the word for the real state of it. For three days Buchner had been searching for his Lieutenant Stampfer, and in those three days he had slept only a few hours. He was tired, and no wonder. He was hungry, and not so used to hunger as the others. He had been to the Tartar Wall, in Stalingrad, and again to the Tartar Wall. Stampfer was lost, his hundred and twenty men had been taken from him for good, and it seemed to him that they too were lost. He had delivered Loose at Town Command, and this Town Command had given him the greatest shock he had had so far. But one did not have to be stunned, as Buchner was, by a hundred experiences, or to be

strangled by hunger, with eyes swollen with exhaustion, to see this room as Buchner saw it. It was the great storeroom. In the dull glare of the stove it looked as if a huge net full of fishes had been turned out, and there were movement and wriggling on the floor. Wounded men, refugees, stragglers, Germans, Croats, Italians, officers and men, sat or stood, crowded round the stove. Coughing, praying, whimpering, the whole house shaking with groans. Buchner sank down, leaning against another man. His men were around him, twenty-six of them. They were waiting for the twenty-seventh, Januschek.

When Januschek came, and Buchner, like the others, was handed his little wafer of dough, he roused himself from a state of torpor that was not sleep. The wafer was so tiny that one swallowed it and that was all. Buchner closed his eyes. He opened them again—time had passed or had not passed, he did not know. He caught sight of a man with a bloody trouser-leg wrapped round the stump of his leg.

Loose could have come here; it would have been better. One didn't do that sort of thing, one didn't deliver a living comrade into hell. He must be fetched out of there! Immediately!

With this thought Buchner fell asleep.

GENERAL GONNERN, TOGETHER WITH HIS neighbour General Vennekohl, had made a counter-attack. It was no counter-attack as in former days, when one took a hill and a few neighbouring villages and held them as a starting-point for future operations. Neither was it a counter-attack of the kind made on the former Stalingrad western front, when one threw the enemy out of a few wrecked tanks in front of the line and occupied these steel houses oneself, thus removing a thorn in one's side. And one could not put into it a division with regiments, battalions and divisional artillery. One had merely the remnants of one's own division; and it was well-nigh a bitter mockery with such illustrious guests as one had in one's cellar: two commanding generals with their chiefs, Ia's, retinue, plus that somewhat difficult Vilshofen. And Gönnern had had to hear a bitter phrase

as he slung his rifle on his shoulder and prepared to go, all the more bitter since it did not entirely lack justification: "The last spasm!"

Still, a line of resistance is not merely a line on paper; and if it gets pushed in it must be ironed out again, without waiting for the order; and, besides, one must get a little breathing-space! The Russians were much too close, they were already firing into one's cooking-pot; one felt one was being observed when one, pardon, squatted over the latrine—and that was no joke, there were tragic instances of it. And though not much was achieved by this counter-attack, at least it freed the trodden path to the balka of the corps-commander, and the path to the flying-school and to the gentlemen in the cellar there. That was something, for farther back one really couldn't do anything more. There would have to be such a street-cleaning carried out daily, and it couldn't be done, it was too expensive, and one was too poor, in men and in rifles too, and in grenades.

General Gönnern, rifle on loosened sling, marched under the tall starry sky across rubble and snow. The heap of ruins at the edge of the field was all that was left of a barracks, and beneath the thick pile of rubble crowned by ragged pieces of wall was the cellar in which Gönnern, with R.-S.-M., field-kitchen and electrical apparatus, had quartered himself with the officers of his staff, and where room had now been found for a few guests.

The general entered a sloping gangway, its side held back with beams, and went below. Rifle and belt he left with his batman, who had followed him. He himself hung his camouflage coat on its nail. Yes, one had needed this counter-attack, and not just for the sake of a trampled path, for to-morrow that would probably again be plagued by machine-gun and mortar nests. One had needed it for other, inner reasons. For what said the proverb: *Only he merits freedom and life who daily has to conquer them.*

In the cellar stood a table, another table, and bunks by the walls. The men sitting and standing around saw Gönnern step up to his bunk and take off his fur coat.

"A nasty cold night," said one.

"Cold and starry," said Gönnern.

Cellar air, the vapour of drying clothes, leather suitcases —some opened—standing around, above the table a bright

lamp fed from the wiring: that was the generals' temporary dwelling. Vilshofen sat in front of the stove, in his hand a sock that he was drying. His eyes rested thoughtfully on Gönnern as he slipped off his coat and stood there in uniform tunic and trousers with the red general's stripe; but it was uncertain whether he even saw Gönnern or whether his gaze went right through him. Nobody enquired of Gönnern about the success of his undertaking. So Gönnern was back, that was all! He could hardly have found out anything new. The others resumed their occupations. Which were: supporting head in hands and thinking, thinking, thinking; or pacing up and down, up and down, up and down. And they always got back to the same point, whether thinking or pacing up and down.

One must await the event, and that from outside. The door must be opened from outside. The hand to open it from inside was not there. They had surrendered their own powers of decision. That was the tragedy of the men here in the cellar, of the army, of the whole nation. That was what Vilshofen was thinking; and further he thought: "The only thing left to decide is the grip on the revolver-handle."

The orderlies were laying the table. They had only been waiting for Gönnern. The officers seated themselves at the table. For dinner there was the same as there had been for lunch. Each had a plate in front of him. In the plate was a dim brew, and in the brew floated six or seven pieces of horse-meat about a cubic centimetre in size. With this there was a slice of bread.

As host, Gönnern sat at the head of the table. The two commanding generals sat to right and left of him. One of them, the corps commander from the ravine by Gumrak, had been cut off from the remnants of his unit in the northern ring. The other, a sexagenarian with blue eyes and snow-white hair, was the successor of General Janicke, who had flown out leaving only the collapse behind him. This commanding general of the southern front now had absolutely nothing behind him. The remnants of some of his staffs were at the southern boundary of the town, and his last division, the 297th Infantry Division, had laid down their arms south of the Tsaritsa and with their commander at their head gone over to the Russians. Vilshofen, sitting next to the commanding general of the southern front, was still without general's badges and was wearing the black

panzer uniform he had worn from the Mius to the Volga, he had since dragged it through the gullies and dugouts of the retreating western front and through all sorts of other places, and it was now no longer black but a tattered grey. Then there was Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht; a colonel from the Economic Department; a captain, recently promoted and still smooth-cheeked, escort to the two commanding generals; and of Gönnern's staff the Ia was there with the divisional vet. and a few younger officers.

After they had begun to eat, another general came in—none other than General Vennekohl, who occupied a neighbouring hole. He had led a troop of men thrown together and in today's counter-attack had been the real driving force.

The gentlemen sat with earnest faces over their horse-soup. "Bit sweet!" was the verdict of the last one to come in, General Vennekohl. His neighbour agreed with a silent nod. The others affected not to have heard the remark. After all, a guest doesn't grumble at the food, even if it is only fit for pigs! But more than one of them thought of the tin of preserves, the sausage, the iron ration in his own rucksack, and felt that it was about time to be informal and put his own food on the table.

It was a depressing meal.

The table was cleared and each of the gentlemen was handed a cup of coffee brew. One could light a cigarette—one still had those. The company rose from the table and resumed their former occupations: thinking round and round, pacing to and fro, staring at nothing, reading a book or skimming through the pages.

The general from Gumrak had always been a wanderer and owed his slim figure not so much to morning riding as to long morning walks. He had retained this habit even in the war. During the French campaign he had wandered through dewy woods, or along the north coast. In the eastern campaign and during the advance he had taken walks from the changing positions of his staff quarters, sometimes along the bank of a river, once through a wood as far as a road-crossing, once through open corn-land till he found himself surrounded by a sea of waving wheat, once over naked steppe to a copse with a wild pear-tree and back again. At Gumrak his morning walk had been first over the soil of the steppe cracked by a merciless sun, later over the snow-covered steppe, and finally from one

end of the ravine to the other and back again. He needed movement in order to think and to let decisions ripen; he had to move about to maintain his mental equilibrium. But what had kept him in motion for days now was no manifestation of mental equilibrium; it was bewilderment; anxiety. He had changed his quarters several times since Gumrak. He had slept one night under the wreckage of a corn elevator, the next under the ruins of an hotel, the third in the cellar of the town prison. Now he had moved into this barrack ruin, and here he paced to and fro, from the bunk to the wall and from the wall to the bunk.

The other commanding general, the one from the south, sat stiffly in his chair. Though he stayed motionless in one place he was no less anxious and no less agitated by scurrying thoughts. Only a few days before he had felt like a youth, scarcely older than a young captain; now he felt his full sixty years.

General Vennekohl was sitting on his chair, his long legs crossed, completely absorbed in the occupation of keeping one of them continually jerking up and down.

Captain Dr. Weichbrot and a few others of the younger officers were sitting together in a corner and conversing softly. From his trunk Gönnern had chosen a book by Goethe and brought it to the table. Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht was reading an old psalm-book and moving his lips as he did so; now and then, when he found something which he considered particularly beautiful or appropriate to the hour, he read out loud. These readings were the highlights of the mood that had descended on Gönnern's bunker. Gönnern even let himself go: "You can sense that something great is coming! No more dirty jokes! A solemn state of mind, like August, 1914."

So they spent their time together in the cella.

One reproached himself; one paced to and fro; one read a psalm-book and moved his lips; one ran through the pages of Goethe's "Faust"; one—the divisional vet.—had fallen asleep in his chair; one—the colonel from the Economic Department—was telling stories of the corruptness of the German ambassador in Paris. "Yes, that gentleman saw the new era merely as a chance to enrich himself and bring the name of Germany into disrepute."

At last General Vennekohl stopped jerking his leg and said: "Yes, Paris, those were the days!" After a pause

he added: "What a pity we didn't carry on the counter-attack beyond the flying-school as far as the Tartar Wall! We'll have to catch up on that."

"You won't catch up much there, Vennekohl," said Vilshofen.

"How d'you mean, Vilshofen?"

"I mean, after to-day's sortie you won't have much left in hand for it."

"Not much left, no, hardly!"

Vilshofen was perhaps the only one who understood the strange train of thought that had led Vennekohl from Paris to the Tartar Wall. So it was true that Vennekohl had remained lying in the dugout out there because some of the last planes had landed under cover of the Tartar Wall and he was still hoping for a miracle—for a plane to land and take him aboard!

The telephone rang.

It was the corps commander, who was in a balka in the vicinity and had been kept informed by the Ia of the progress of the "counter-attack." All listened to the conversation, or at least to Gönnern's replies. From these it was not difficult to guess what the general at the other end of the wire was saying.

"Carry on? But we can't carry on any longer, Herr General!"

"You've got ammunition, haven't you?"

"*Jawohl*, Herr General. A little rifle ammunition and a few grenades."

"And you've got food, haven't you?"

"*Jawohl*. We've had a horse-meat soup to-day, and for tomorrow we've got another horse-meat soup."

"Carry on then! You defend your battle position. Give me your word on that!"

"*Jawohl*, Herr General. I give you my word."

"To the last horse-soup," thought Vilshofen. "Bit sweet, this heroic dish; bit sweet this whole heroic epic with psalm-book and Goethe's 'Faust,' Part II, all ending with an heroic death. But the soup will be eaten, *jawohl*, Herr General.

"But it's not true! They deceive themselves, they lie! They've no intention of doing it; they shudder at the last act; they won't swallow the bitter potion that one general handed to ten thousand and another to fifteen thousand men!

"The men had to swallow it, they had no choice! These

here won't swallow it. They've still got the choice, and we shall see—yes, I want to see—what they'll choose."

"How? How? How?" Vilshofen's thoughts went on. "In so far as they are sincere and honest they're all thinking the same: How . . . how to do it? What way to take?"

"Hartmann!" Suddenly this name whipped from one end of the cellar to the other. At that moment it was more than the name of a Stalingrad general. It was a sudden shock and caused a halt, a catching of breath, a breaking-off in the middle of the story. The divisional vet. raised his sunken head and looked round in bewilderment. Even to Vilshofen the name seemed to have been shouted by a strange voice. Only when he found all eyes turned on him did he realise that he himself had shouted it.

General von Hartmann had been commander of the 71st Infantry Division, the "lucky division" which in September, with two regiments, had been the first to penetrate into Stalingrad. His soldiers had had first pick and had fitted out their bunkers with booty from whole districts of Stalingrad and supplied their commander's ravine with carpets, candelabra and other plunder. The conqueror was lord of a whole village of subterranean dwellings, with granaries, an agricultural experimental station, a vegetable and poultry farm, herds of cows, and its own dairy and steam-mill. Short-lived splendour, vanished riches, lost war! By the Tsaritsa he had climbed on to the railway track, with his tall fur cap on his head, then raised his rifle and shot at random. A Russian bullet got him in the centre of the forehead: he dropped like a felled tree and rolled down the embankment.

"Yes, he had a nice quick death, a bullet in the middle of the forehead, he was gone in a moment!"

"Yes, Hartmann. . . ."

"The way he stood there, that was magnificent, that was a real Prussian!"

"He was the last Prussian," said Vilshofen.

"The last? I don't quite understand."

"I don't see the next one getting up on the railway track."

"*Jawohl*, it was magnificent!" said General Vennekohl. "But you must realise that that's a form of suicide."

"Have you anything against suicide, Vennekohl?"

"How d'you mean?"

"Well, as a matter of principle."

"I think our C.-in-C. spoke pretty sharply against it."

"It's simply this: Hartmann went the way he'd made others go," said Vilshofen. "He went the same way—he set the example!"

This was a challenge to each man to define his attitude. It was agonising. A painful silence spread over the company. It was bridged, temporarily at least, by the entry of the Ic with a captain, a muddy little front-line captain with eyes that still tried to see the funny side of things. He had been taken prisoner and the Russians had sent him back. He told of his experiences. "The Russians aren't so terrible after all! I've been in the staff there—everybody darting about, clicking heels, saluting." He gave an imitation. "*Jawohl*, like that, Herr General. To see that sort of thing again—Herr General would have liked it! I had food there, too, and plenty of it. Bread, and quite thick jam on it."

Vennekohl began jerking his leg again. "Indeed? Thick jam on it? That's fine! But do we have to hear about it?"

Gönnern took his Ic aside and told him to isolate the captain carefully from the other officers and then get him to the Ic at H.Q. Vilshofen butted in: "They're not so particular about that now Gönnern. Over in the prison I saw a sergeant-major who'd been sent back. Nobody thought about the Ic at H.Q."

"You'll pardon me, Vilshofen!"

"*Jawohl*, certainly, Herr General!"

It was really no business of Vilshofen's and one had to reject such interference. The Ic left with the captain. With regret they saw him go. Actually Vilshofen was right in wanting to keep the captain there. What were the Russians up to? The captain could have told them a lot. But the door closed behind captain and Ic, and again they sat there by themselves, again pacing, reading, thinking.

What did one do, when did one do it, how did one do it?

"Janicke! Pickert!" Someone uttered these names as if suddenly awakening from a deep sleep. General Janicke may not have received the famous "blighty one"; but a plank had grazed his forehead and he had flown out at the last moment.

Janicke flown out, wounded of course, but flown out! Pickert flown out, by order of course, but flown out! Hube flown out, by order of course, but flown out! The Quarter-master of the 8th Corps flown out without order—and

therefore shot without court-martial on Tarnopol airfield!

They're out of it!

Hartmann on the railway track!

Stempel poisoned himself!

They're out of it, too!

What did one do, when did one do it, how did one do it?

" The Commander-in-Chief has given a verbal decision against suicide and has forbidden it! " said the general from Gumrak.

" It's not so easy to shoot yourself," said Gönnern.

" No, it certainly isn't," agreed Vennekohl.

Vilshofen interjected: " And there's no certainty about that sort of counter-attack, Vennekohl. Especially if one can't make up one's mind to stand up as a visible target."

" You're right again there."

There was a pregnant atmosphere in the cellar. Though Vennekohl had made this brief reply he snatched for his monocle and fixed it in his eye; with a rigid expression on his face he regarded Vilshofen more closely. The tension was suddenly relieved from another corner. The commanding general from the south, who had already been showing signs of impatience, rose from his chair, stepped to the middle of the room and stood there leaning forward a little with his well-chiselled features under the white hair.

" I? Commit suicide for that guttersnipe! Never! "

This was a declaration, and a weighty one. One had to repeat to oneself what had been said; one had to see the tall figure bent a little forward, the face and the eyes dark with anger under the bushy white eyebrows, before one could quite realise that a commanding general had uttered these words—and not " *en famille* " but publicly. The effect was various. There were astonishment, bewilderment and horror; there was fear, even panic. Was it possible? An idol was knocked off its pedestal and no thunder and lightning struck down from heaven to annihilate the blasphemer! Such a word had never been uttered on the soil of Stalingrad, except perhaps in the cellars of death, where it was weak and powerless and scarcely reached the ear of the next man, himself on the point of death.

Here it had been flung out, to be heard!

. . . . .

Vilshofen, in his long driver's coat, strode through the town of a hundred balkas. Snow, and under the snow a

shattered car, a collapsed house, plaster and columns and twisted banisters, under the snow a mummy with a jutting, shrivelled hand. On the snow-covered heap of rubble and the ice-block that had been a car, on the smashed lift-shaft, on the jutting, shrivelled hand, a blue light gleamed and stars looked down through the window-frames of a tall house-front.

Through the long street the man's way led him by the empty shells of houses, across yards, past long, dead walls that were nothing but hole after hole and row upon row of hollow window-frames. It was scarcely credible that once there had been water-pipes and drains, shops and offices, theatres and restaurants, street-lighting and hospitals. A dead city, sunk a thousand years under a deluge of ashes and now suddenly pushed upward in the starry night; and still the trembling underground, still the shifting ash. And in the bleakness the footsteps of a living being.

The man reached a wide square in the mist rising from the frozen river. Rocket-shells, white and flickering—like a row of street-lamps turned on, off, and on again. A burning house, and another, glowed in the mist, and yet another belching black smoke-clouds that bellied out and up to the sky. This third one was a corner-building with three wings, once the seat of Town Command, in which by order of Army Headquarters the wounded streaming into Stalingrad had been assembled. At the corner, and right and left of the tall building, there was machine-gun and shell-fire and the sharp crack of flak-guns.

The man crossed the square and dived into the maze of streets on the other side. Narrow lanes sloped down to the river-bank, where stood charred wooden houses with gates and fences missing, and battered tree-trunks jutting up like posts, smashed sheds, a railway-track, and on the rails shell-riddled locomotives. A view into and down to this territory studded with dugouts and criss-crossed by communication trenches was possible only over walls of rubble and ruins and through meshes of barbed wire. This territory on the bank of the mighty, frozen, snow-covered river was the never trodden and never captured ninth ninth of the town.

The man turned his back to the river and vanished again in the confusion of streets and ruins. Through towering walls perforated by thousands of empty doorways and window-frames, his eyes fell on the well-lit Heroes' Square

and, at the corner of the square, on the tall ruin of the Stalingrad Department Store. He cast a glance through the narrow gap at the Theatre Cellar filled with wounded, separated only by a barricade of sandbags and barbed wire from the Heroes' Square and Army Headquarters.

The man in the driver's coat wandered through the town. His footsteps led through a snow-covered balka, rose again up the other slope, through gates and past columns, by jutting chimneys and house-ruins, and over white fields. A lean Russian girl flitted through a ruin and vanished into a hole with an armful of firewood. In a cellar lay a wounded soldier, gurgling, already unconscious. The man reached the shattered railway-station. In front of the station was a wide square; behind, a row of burning houses. Then through the dark tunnel of a bridge, where the way was blocked by smashed wagons, corpses lay around and wounded men shrieked.

Again a salvo of shells skimming house-fronts and jutting chimneys; again fountains of rubble and snow from mortar-bombs. The massive black walls at which the firing was directed were the once commodious building of the People's Home Commissariat, next to the town prison.

The man in the long driver's coat left the town prison behind. The burning wall towards which he strode rose on the Stalingrad town boundary. Where the wall showed a dark patch he stepped through. In front of him stretched the broad steppe over which he had once come riding on a tank. On the same route he stepped out into the white night under the tall sky.

Behind him lay the moon-city of craters, rubble-heaps, burst asphalt, burned-out stone houses and groaning cellars; street after street and cave after cave, beehives of sick, scabby, wound-covered men, a thousand in one cellar, a thousand in the next, two thousand, ten thousand in others, with Goethe and psalm-book and cognac, and Spengler and van der Bruck thrown into the rubble; the physically and spiritually exausted soldier-population.

Such was the scene of the lost battle, of the lost war, of the zenith of the German struggle for power, of the heaviest defeat in the history of German war, of the deepest moral and political downfall of the German nation. Where fearless speech before thrones was the need of the hour, there had sounded the single heel-click of four-and-twenty generals; where the fury of hordes of soldiers should have

battered down the walls of the generals' quarters, there was nothing but bodily and spiritual decay and apathy and dying without even a curse on the lips. The man wandering out into the snow and the night bore within him the image of this plunge into chaos and disintegrating atoms.

The tragedy of this downfall, and the mountain of Error, piled layer on layer, that found such fearful expression—let that not be forgotten!

. . . . .

"Lord, how are they increased that trouble me. . . ."

This psalm could not only be spoken, it could be sung too. It rang out in a cellar at the town boundary, not in the common room, but in a little room at the side. Hands with long fingers and knotty joints laid the flute which had accompanied the psalm into the satin-lined case and closed the lid. For the first time Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht, to whom up to now the playing of it had been but an exercise of will, had blown into the flute with all his soul, and the opening words of the psalm had penetrated every fibre of his being. He laid the flute, which at this hour had been an instrument for the expression of his deepest need, carefully into its case: that was right and proper. But he left the case on the table and did not pack it in the rucksack with the other things; and that might have been a sinister omen. The other men, a major, the corps commissariat-officer, a captain, and a lieutenant, had already shouldered their rucksacks. Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht, too, shouldered his rucksack, and donned his fur cap. There was nothing more to say. Everything had been agreed. A glance to the major, to the commissariat-officer, to the captain, to the lieutenant. Five men; five blanched faces.

"Well, gentlemen?"

Like thieves they stole out of the cellar, past the door of the common-room, up the slope leading outside, and past the sentry. Though the sentry was startled when the white face of the lieutenant-colonel appeared so suddenly at his side, he saluted correctly, then gazed dumbfounded after the five gentlemen loaded with rucksacks.

Lieutenant-Colonel Unschlicht led the way, three or more paces ahead of the others. Their direction was westwards, towards the snowy steppe south of the Tartar ravine. But wedged in as they were with ruins right and left, they found themselves facing a battery of firing Russian mortars. To both sides of the battery, too, flashed

fire. The lieutenant-colonel strode steadily forward on his long legs.

The officer next below him in seniority, the major, caught up with him. "Excuse me, Herr Oberstleutnant, but we can't get through this way."

A look up of the face with the big nose and the wide, grey, bird-like eyes. "As we agreed, then."

The five gentlemen turned round. Again the lieutenant-colonel led. The way led back in an arc past Gönnern's battle position, out of which they had come, then on into the town. They went through balkas, through bombed houses, straight across the square at one corner of which the upper stories of Town Command were wreathed in smoke. Then on to the embankment and as far as the territory adjacent to the river-bank and fortified by the Russians; then they went in single file to the middle of the river and along it through driving snow, over cracks in the ice, over piles of ice-floes frozen together. The sky seemed higher and the stars more numerous and larger than ever before. The town stretching for twenty kilometres along the right bank of the Volga was as distant as land is to a sailor skirting the coast, and the heavy rumbling in the centre and in the foundations of the town did not penetrate to the middle of the river. Only when the artillery on the other side spanned its high trajectories, when the sky seemed to rumble for minutes like a passing railway-train and shells hacked into the wounded town—then there was not only the one detonation, then all the depths and caverns roared together; and afterwards there was again only snow, again the sky, again silence. The men bent their heads against the wind as they worked their way forward step by step across waves of snow and ice-floes. Then came another phenomenon.

A flyer flung out light-rockets, and sky and earth were transfigured. The night was flooded with white light; the river-bank was no longer a steep cliff in the mist; unveiled and naked stood the forest of empty stone boxes and the petrified confusion of that tooth-pick world. The light penetrated all the pores and holes, and some of the rockets floated over the river and hung there with the weeping spheres of light. All was light, and the five men out there were too conspicuous; they must bury their faces in the snow and dive into the white gleaming mantle. Not until the last light had dropped down and the sky was visible

again and the stars twinkled as if the white apparition had not been did they rise and wander on downstream.

Again on the other bank a gun thundered through the silence and awakened a hundredfold echo. Again falling light-rockets; again the men flung themselves down. After three hours' march—a normal effort of twelve kilometres—they had put perhaps six kilometres behind them. When the lieutenant-colonel, who had always kept a considerable distance ahead, took a sudden sharp turn and made for the land it seemed to the others to be too soon. They thought that they should have marched till dawn before turning to the bank and to the west; but they followed silently in the footsteps of their leader. They reached the bank, gained the land and mounted the embankment. In the snow were the black ashes of burnt-out fires and stumps of charred wooden huts, then a row of empty houses with the banging of doors opening and closing in the wind, and rifle shots audible in the endless ghostly play of ownerless doors.

What was wrong with the lieutenant-colonel?

When they were in the middle of the stream and under the glare of the light-rockets he had not flung himself down but gone striding on in conspicuous solitude. On reaching the land he gave no sign of fearing he might put his foot on an S-mine or a T-mine in the mine-belt lying there; and now he strode forward without looking to right or left for safety.

Where were they? Still in Tsaritsa-South or already in Yelshanka? They did not know. But they had run into a fighting area again. Artillery was strewing its salvos. The lieutenant-colonel strode straight on. Major, commissariat-officer, captain and lieutenant flung themselves to the ground. Now, with faces pressed into the snow, weary from wandering over the ice, deafened by the roar of exploding shells, looking up and seeing the lieutenant-colonel like a tall, dishevelled scarecrow, at last they understood.

" He doesn't want to break out at all, he wants something else! "

And that something else happened. Not without reason was the posture of a dishevelled, wind-blown scarecrow. The lieutenant-colonel raised both arms, held them up, one hand right, one hand left, for as long as it takes a winking eyelid to close and open again. Then he

staggered, reeled backwards and lay full length in the snow. The others heard the groaning. The major, as the senior of them, crawled nearer. A rough splinter of shell had torn off half the face of the lieutenant-colonel.

" Herr Oberstleutnant——"

A groan.

" Herr Oberstleutnant, is there anything I can do for you? "

" Yes, what we agreed in advance."

They had agreed that if any one of them should be wounded on the way the others should give him the *coup de grâce*. The major did not know that in his anguish he groaned louder than the wounded man as he drew his service-revolver.

" Herr Oberstleutnant, may I ask one question? Do you believe that you will go to heaven? "

" *Jawohl*, I'm going to heaven! "

A revolver shot rang out through the icy air. It was one hour before dawn, and it was the end of the break-out attempt. Major, commissariat-officer, captain, lieutenant lay in a circle round the dead man. As the first light crept up from the Volga they rose. With hands held high they approached the nearest Russian sentry.

And this lieutenant-colonel, major, commissariat-officer, captain, lieutenant and their wrecked break-out attempt were part of the image in dissolution; and so was the wandering in single file down the Volga and the death in the morning mist between Tsaritsa-South and Beketovka. Let that, too, not be forgotten!

. . . . .

Black and massive, with five-foot-thick walls, rose the house of the People's Home Commissariat, called by the German soldiers the G.P.U. House. The building had been bombed, the roofs swept off, the upper stories burned out, and bomb-tracks led like ventilation-shafts down to the huge lower rooms. The massive outside walls gave good protection against shrapnel and shielded the yard, wide as a parade-ground, from bullets.

In the yard was a field-kitchen which for days had lacked now food, now water, and in front of which long lines of ration-parties stood day and night. Immediately behind the field-kitchen, by the sides of the trodden path to the latrine, and scattered around elsewhere, lay the dead, frozen stiff—victims of Russian mortar-batteries which

held the yard under fire. Even those that died in the rooms were no longer being buried, but were carried out and laid in the snow.

The remains of a tank-corps, the ruins of two motorised divisions, and fragments of other units which were holding a sort of main battle-line on the western border of the town and had occupied firing-positions in the surrounding ruins, were quartered here, some two thousand men altogether. With the wounded and the occupants of neighbouring ruins, about five thousand men were concentrated here. The men occupied the large halls above ground-level. The staffs—and there were many—sat underground in the prison-cells lying along long corridors. Pairs of sentries were posted at the cell-entrances to keep out anyone not on business.

One of these cells, six paces by two and provided with a small barred window some five feet from the floor, was occupied by Lieutenant-General Damme, who had lost his entire division and had nothing more behind him. He was accompanied only by the officers of his staff, who had taken up quarters in neighbouring cells. But twenty-four hours ago Damme had suddenly become a military commander again. The commander of a tank-corps, who had "left for the front" (which meant that he was wandering around somewhere in the world of ruins), had handed his corps over to Damme for the time being.

Damme sat at the table with the telephone-receiver to his ear. He was engaged in a most unpleasant conversation with the Commander-in-Chief at the other end of the wire.

"It has come to my ears, Damme," it had begun, "that your lot are negotiating with the Russians."

That was about right, and now he'd have to speak out!

"*Jawohl*, Herr Feldmarschall!" (He nearly said "Herr General," for the C.-in-C. had only been promoted the same day and, with the usual army secrecy, staffs had not been officially informed.) "*Jawohl*, Herr Feldsmarschall; and not only my lot. I myself led the negotiations with the Russians.

What did they expect him to do? Army H.Q. gave no more orders, had given none for days. All that had reached command posts was: "Hold on! Hold on even if there are no weapons to hold on with!" Army H.Q. had sunk into the silence of the grave; what did it want of him?

"The Chief of Staff has informed me of this serious matter, Damme!"

Damme could well believe the Chief had had a hand in it again. Without the change in tone, the sudden acerbity in the usually rather mournful voice, he could imagine the "Evil Genius of the Field-Marshal" sitting opposite in the flesh and watching over the conversation.

"Listen, Damme, not even with your own division—on behalf of another unit you've entered into negotiations for surrender."

"*Jawohl*, Herr Feldmarschall, I have. But here in this cell there was a meeting of all the officers. They were informed that steps had been taken to put an honourable end to the heroic struggle. Each one was asked separately: 'Do you agree?' And each one stood up and answered: 'Yes.' What else is there to do? How can this go on?"

"You know the order, Damme?"

"*Jawohl*, I know the order, Herr Feldmarschall."

"Then it must be perfectly clear that negotiations are out of the question! The order will be carried out, precisely and to the end, Herr General!"

The order from the Führer's Headquarters was: To the last bullet! The supplementary order was: Negotiators from the enemy lines to be fired at. Further corps orders for commanders with no more troops and only their staffs round them said: The position will be defended.

Thus it was all clear, at least on paper.

"But there is nothing left to eat, Herr Feldmarschall!"

"I am aware of that!"

"The wounded are no longer getting attention, Herr Feldmarschall."

"I am aware of that!"

"The enemy is closing in all round. Facing the Russians guns, they can be seen approaching with the naked eye——"

"I am aware of all that!"

"And it's evident that we can't count on any relief, Herr Feldmarschall."

So it went on. The conversation began at half-past eleven at night and lasted till nearly one o'clock. During the last quarter-hour the Chief of Staff took a hand in it, shouting oaths and abuse and finally becoming downright insulting, losing his temper and ending in a fury of wild threats.

There sat Damme that night. He ran his hand through his hair, and the hand came away wet. "The order will be carried out—what an order, utter lunacy! It's intolerable. swinish! Sweat just pours down. Blankness in the head. Cold down the spine. No appetite—but in these conditions that's the least of my troubles. No inclination for a game of bridge or anything else. At other times I might have drunk a few cups of hot tea and rum, got under a couple of blankets, had a good sweat and been all right. But here—eternally staring at that little barred window, this eternal firing, those eternal sights outside—it's intolerable, swinish!"

And of course when a German cavalry captain who'd been sent over there came back with a Russian major, Damme had sat with the two of them and considered what was to be done. "There'll be a drop left somewhere. No? Well, boil some coffee," he had said to his interpreter, Weidemann. But there was not even coffee. Nothing to offer—and outside they were carrying another one out by shoulders and feet and throwing him on the heap with the others. That was the state of affairs. It was obvious, common sense showed the way, and it needed no long consideration to realise that there was nothing for it but to put an honourable end to the heroic struggle. And that was precisely the formula on which they had agreed. It was all in perfect order, and it would have been carried out if the Russian had not wanted, as he said, to widen the base a little and bring in the 29th Motorised and whatever else was lying around. And now Army H.Q. phoned and the Chief of Staff butted in. It was really too idiotic! And always this shooting, and stiff dead men being dragged out, always that tumult in front of the field-kitchen, and all of it senseless, no object in it! And oneself—the hair came off in your hand when you ran it through. Digestion didn't function any more. How could it? Not a drop of coffee, not a cigar left. One sank into utter mental depression and was fit for nothing. But one must do something, for to-morrow the thing was supposed to be coming off. In the morning the big capitulation was to take place, so it was agreed with the Russian.

General Dainme rose, opened the door and shouted, so that it echoed along the corridor, for his interpreter. Weidermann, who knew about the telephone conversation

and was crouching in the next cell with the colonel and the rest of the staff officers, came in at once. He had been expecting this call and knew what was required of him. The colonels next door knew what the General would do after the telephone talk and had already made up their minds: " Then we'll just have to do it ourselves."

" Herr Weidemann, I'm forbidden to capitulate. We must inform the Russians. We must tell them we break off negotiations. Take over that mission please." That was all Damme said.

Afterwards he sat alone in his cell, and again the naked misery of four walls stared down at him. He stared at the wall. He knew what had been said and decided on the other side of it, and he thought: " Well, the colonels will have to do it then!

And this telephone conversation between army and commander, this capitulation—stopped, yet later carried out—was part of the downfall of an army and the plunge into chaos; and so was this last hour and the cold sweat breaking out on the neck of a commander without a division who had taken the field with seventeen thousand men. Let that, too, not be forgotten!

. . . . .

Within a few minutes' walk from Army Headquarters, and separated from it by a heap of sandbags, was the Theatre Cellar which, connected by a corridor with the cellars under the ruins of " Red Army House " (the so-called " Timoshenko Cellar "), formed with them the catacombed village of wounded men. In the lowest part of this subterranean village, bathed day and night in hot vapours, was the operating cave of Senior-M.O. Huth.

Huth was finished. Not his nerves, for they had stood up all the long way. Yelling under the knife, loud gurgling, silent dying, seventy-seven days long. Working in this foul atmosphere Huth had thinned to a skeleton; yet his hands had worked steadily, untiringly, against the ever-rising tide of death. If a hundred patients had died after successful operation, one perhaps had survived, and this one he wanted to put to his credit. But now even this one could no longer survive, for without the thin soup that must be added to a hundred other miracles the thread of life must snap. This condition had been reached. For days the Theatre Cellar had been entirely without food. Thus the work of the doctor had been the cutting of living



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flesh, the sawing of living bones, to no other purpose than through agony and " successful " operation to prolong the process of dying.

That was the conclusion Huth had reached after much thought. He did not complete the cut he had begun on a thigh. He laid the bloody scalpel back on the table, turned round, took off his oilcloth apron, and hung it on the nail. When he had washed hands and arms and donned his coat he turned round again and surveyed the man lying on the operating table. A not too muscular but well-proportioned body which, in other circumstances, looked good for another half-century. A young captain—Huth recollected that a few days ago he had had him there with a head-wound. The man drew breath; the lips, half-open with pain, trembled; the eyelids opened, and the look from the still glazed eyes swam in emptiness. Huth would not wait till he fully recovered consciousness. It had been in his power to deliver him in one moment from all pain, to do to him what the system he served was doing methodically and on a gigantic scale to the old, the sick, the worn-out. But he recoiled from the thought. Not from religious scruples—or perhaps it was religious scruples and an inborn code that held him back from such a deed.

Viktor Huth fled up the stairs, leaving behind him the wounded man on the table and the medical orderlies. He reached the big cellar-room in which lay, man by man, with only narrow footpaths between the groups, seven or eight hundred wounded, sick, dying and already dead men; a room that after twice or at the latest three times twenty-four hours must be a cellar of incipient rigor mortis, greenish bellies, dirty-brown complexions, softening, protruding eyeballs, and the ever-rising odour of decay. But now death still flickered from all corners. screamed with a many-voiced choir of loud complaint. Unbearable pain screamed itself into unconsciousness. The hunger of such as had been fed till then and still had some strength left roared loudly. A maddened torso, that still had lungs to roar with, heaved itself up and then collapsed again.

A superhuman voice, fed by electric batteries, rang through the room. And for a time, under this loud-speaker voice, pain was forgotten, the act of dying was suspended, raging men held their breath. The cellar took sides, for and against, for listening and for switching off.

"Turn it off!" howled a chorus of voices.
"Louder, louder!" yelled others.
"Turn it off!"
"Listen!"
"That fat swine!"
"That pot-belly!"
"Better if he'd kept his word!"
"It's his fault!"
"Lets us starve!"

One man shivering with fever cried: "Water!" Another racked with pain cried: "Morphia!" Below the ceiling electric lamps swayed. In this respect this cellar, which was situated near H.Q. Staff and was in charge of the M.O. from H.Q., differed from the others. The upper part was illuminated, the lower part remained in half-light. Two army chaplains were moving through the mist among the stretched-out or crouching forms of men wrapped in rags. Pastor Koog and Chaplain Kalser had met again here. Koog was taking a last message from a dying man. Kalser was murmuring over another: "The eternal light be upon him!"

Doctor Huth leant with his back against the wall. He caught sight of the wounded captain he had left behind on the operating-table. Suddenly the captain was standing there, his wounded leg dragging. He sank down beside Huth.

"Herr Doktor!"

"Herr Hauptmann, what can I do? There's no sense in it, it would only prolong the agony!"

"Then let it be prolonged, Doctor. Please, Doctor!"

"Stretch your leg out. But listen first!"

"What is that?"

"The Reichsmarschall!"

The unctuous tenor forced itself through the tumult, through cries of "Turn it off!" and "Listen!", through howling and cursing, through the battle orders of a panzer-lieutenant. Pastor, doctor and captain all listened.

". . . people's army . . . community of the people . . . Germans together . . . finished with old ideas . . . but, my comrades, only he can fight whose whole passionate soul is in it. . . ."

"Whose whole passionate soul is in it, and let me not weaken in Thy battle, O Lord!" prayed Chaplain Kalser as he closed the eyelids of a soldier. With half-opened

eyes he looked around and discovered another who needed him. There were so many now. Slowly he stood up, wearily moved along and silently sank down by the next. Doctor Huth, thirty-four years old but with a face like a mummy now, observed everything: the two chaplains; apathetic, dozing men; silently dying men; men squandering their last strength in mounting rage. He noticed a youthful-looking quartermaster, whose hollow eyes and long fingers were in ceaseless movement. He heard the panzer-lieutenant roaring, not tank-orders but such as are shouted in trenches: evidently the lieutenant had last been sent into action with the infantry. Then Huth heard the captain sobbing beside him. He realised that the captain was not far from a hysterical outbreak.

"What's the matter, Captain? I'll do it for you, but let's wait a bit first."

But it was not his wound which was troubling Tomas at this moment. It was a memory which had utterly unmanned him. The last time he had listened to the Wehrmacht broadcast had been on New Year's Eve. It was the Königsberg station, and it had remained in his memory like despairing, melancholy music. The Königsberg announcer was his betrothed, and the voice he heard was hers. Now it was the tenor of the Reichsmarschall.

"Weltanschauung. . . . Weltanschauung . . . a Weltanschauung hard as granite . . . a Weltanschauung that our Führer has created. . . . What strength from this Weltanschauung . . . what blessings . . . duty of the leaders to set an example . . . what herculean tasks our Führer has accomplished . . . out of this stew, human stew . . . to create a nation hard as steel." So it went on, and immediately after: "A Führer who is the greatest German in history!"

But now it was becoming inaudible, drowned under howls, cat-calls, cries of "Turn it off!" and "Listen!". The panzer-lieutenant roared: "Come on with the ammunition! Lie down, don't get up! Shoot!"

An R.S.M. came down the stairs with an armful of skinned sausages, big, red ones. "Panzer Regiment 36!" he called. Men of the 36th, lying in a corner, yelled with all the strength of their lungs: "Over here, over here, R.S.M.!" Everybody cried: "Me too, me too, R.S.M.!"

These sausages stirred up the whole cellar; in a moment they were handed out. Those that got anything wolfed it greedily down. Others sat around looking on, then fell

back exhausted. And those that had eaten and devoured were exhausted by the effort and lay down again.

"The Reichsmarschall's voice went on: "The icy Russian winter *and* the weakness of various leaders were overcome. Here again over everything was the Führer, who with his strength has held the eastern front. . . . Then came the day when for the first time the German panzer grenadiers burst into the fortress of Stalingrad and firmly established themselves on Russian's river of fate, the Volga. . . ."

The whole cellar groaned.

". . . the enemy is hard, but the German soldier has become harder . . . we have taken coal and iron from the Russians, without these a great armament is impossible—now we see them making a last gigantic effort . . . new divisions, others filled out again, but they're not new classes, no, they're tired old men and sixteen-year-old children——"

"Old men! Children!" someone yelled. The men howled. Officers crouched there, stony-faced under bloodstained rags of bandages. Teeth were clenched to hold back the words that wanted to come out. There was not groaning now, but white rage, bursting blood-vessels, rising temperatures, the pistol-shot of a suicide.

The fat tenor droned on: " . . . and above all these gigantic battles now towers, like a mighty monumental building, Stalingrad, the battle for Stalingrad. This will be the greatest battle of heroes" ("*Mein Gott*, why this soft soap, an organised supply by air we could have done with!") "that ever took place in our history, the battle which our grenadiers, sappers, gunners, flak-gunners, from general to the last private" ("Bloody lie!") "are fighting against enormous odds for every block, every stone, every hole, every ditch, fighting on and on, weary, exhausted. We know a mighty epic of a mighty battle, the battle of the Nibelungen. They too stood to the last——"

"Written off!" shouted somebody.

Written off! The thought reeled through the cellar. They knew it, but that somebody should say it, shout it at them, was too much.

"Written off!"

"That fat-gutted swine sits in the warmth, he was never with us on the airfield!"

"I'm no hero, I'm hungry."

"Starvation!"

"Funeral hymn!"

"Turn it off, turn it off!"

". . . this sacrifice, my comrades, should anyone be inclined to weaken let him think of the fighters of Stalingrad. . . . My soldiers, thousands of years ago there stood in a narrow pass in Greece a bold and eternally valiant man with three hundred of his men, stood Leonidas with three hundred Spartans. The sky was dark with the shower of arrows, but the three hundred neither halted nor faltered till the last man had fallen . . . now we have a saying: Wanderer, if thou comest to Sparta, say that thou hast seen us lying here as the law commanded. . . . So one day it will be said: If thou comest to Germany, say that thou hast seen us lying in Stalingrad as the law commanded——"

"Turn it off!"

"Piffle!"

"*Mein Gott*, now the folks at home think we're dead!"

"Help!"

"Help! It was a cry out of deepest extremity. The high, howling tone hung in the air. The cellar was again the Theatre Cellar that it had been. Men went on dying. The same wave of pain broke over all.

Few now heard the words: "To the soldier it does not matter whether he dies at Stalingrad, at Rshev, in Africa or in the icy north . . . there will always be those that bleat against it . . . when the soldier sets out he reckons with the probability that he will not come back. If he does come back he's very lucky. . . ."

Few heard the words: "It's the Jew that rules over there. We need only know the Jew in his Old Testament hatred. . . ."

Few heard when he said: "Who, I ask, is so God-forsaken that he will not see where we stand to-day? Who is it that stands from the North Cape to Africa and the Volga?"

Few heard the lame excuse of the Reichsmarschall: "And why, so asks many a *Volksgenosse*, do we not avenge it? Don't forget, *Volksgenossen*, that we have a gigantic theatre of war and the main weight of the Luftwaffe is fighting in the south, in the north, in the east. . . ."

"It's not fighting here, anyhow! The bombs that fall

are Russian bombs and they're not old men and children in the bombers! "

But who still listened? One or another heard a sentence or two here and there. The loud-speaker voice of the Reichsmarschall was merely a spectral voice " off." The Theatre Cellar was a cellar without food, without bread, without hope. The cellar was written off, all Stalingrad was written off: that was what the fat voice from Berlin had made plain. And now one man's mouth never closed, and what he was roaring was: " Help! " Trembling men crouched against the walls. One lay with face blue, foam on the lips. Leaning against the wall were men with no muscles left, some that were mere skeletons. There were men with failing eyes, and men totally deaf. A squad of field gendarmes with their tin placards waded through the rows looking into the faces of sick men. Men dying face-downwards they turned over to see whether they were malingering. They sought and found some, pulled them on to their feet, and took them away to make up a troop. And over all was that one hysterical voice. One man was shouting his soul out. It was the cry for help of the whole cellar.

Chaplain Kalser folded his hands and with closed eyes and motionless lips prayed: " My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my gums: and Thou shalt bring me unto the dust of death. . . ."

Pastor Koog was taking another scribbled last message. By now he had so many of these scraps of paper, and his pockets were stuffed full of souvenirs. Where could he lay them, the halves of identity discs, the photographs, the wrist-watches, the wedding rings, the bits of paper with the scrawled words of the last hour? Scarcely into the hands of the wife, the mother, the old father. If it must be he would lay watches and rings and greetings before the throne of God. But if not before the throne of God—a thought that filled him with dismay—then where? Into what ear the last sigh? " And if not Thou, who will have seen us in Stalingrad, who will make manifest that it was not Thy law that commanded it? "

Viktor Huth leant against the wall. He too was thinking of law and lawlessness. A measureless undertaking must end in disaster. The advance to the Volga (and it had been conceived as a march much farther afield, a march to the Ganges, a march without end)—perhaps it had to

end in such a Theatre Cellar. Around Huth—for many days now—were hysterical laughter, hysterical weeping, in his ears the piercing shrieks of men rocked with sobbing. His eyes rested again on the young quartermaster sitting opposite him with hollow eyes and rigid face, who was ceaselessly spreading and clenching his fingers. As the world is mirrored in a drop of water, so the march to the east—undertaken not from necessity but in lawlessness—was reflected in the involuntary muscular movements of the hand of a young quartermaster.

Suddenly something else sounded amid the howling, the panting and the gurgling of death: the dull thudding of the imminent catastrophe. A shell-hit close by made the massive catacomb tremble and awoke Huth from his thoughts. With the next hit, while the cellar held its breath, he was on his feet. He carried out the operation on Captain Tomas, his last. Then he ran off, without greatcoat or cap, up the steps, out into the street and past the sandbags and barricades on the square flooded with searchlights. The sentry at the 10.5 cm. haubitzer, the field gendarmes at the door of the ruined department-store, were standing together and so occupied with other things that he passed through the entrance unchallenged. Soon he stood before the door of the Commander-in-Chief of the army.

The cellar he had left now rumbled at intervals of minutes as shells landed nearby. From then on that was the rhythm at which the eight hundred motionless wounded breathed in the Theatre Cellar.

And this cellar in the territory of ruins between the Volga and Tsaritsa; the eight hundred men in their last extremity hearing their own funeral dirge; the stumbling chaplain, weary unto death under the last sighs of dying men; the disintegration of a gigantic army reflected in the trembling of a hand; the last hour of the Theatre Cellar: let that, too, not be forgotten!

. . . . .

The big Stalingrad department-store was partly razed to the ground, partly standing to half its original height, partly towering as before; the interior had been demolished by infantry battles and finally burnt out. It was one of those buildings which two regiments of Hartmann's division had taken room by room and floor by floor and lost and taken again.

The department-store ruin had first been the battle-position of the Roske infantry regiment and later that of Hartmann's division. The regiments had melted away. The division no longer numbered even battalion strength, and a few days before had been further decimated south of the Tsaritsa ravine; there, too, the divisional commander, General von Hartmann, had mounted the railway-track and been struck down by a Russian rifle-bullet.

This division, now existing in name only, had been taken over by one of the regimental commanders, Colonel Roske. This successor of Hartmann was now master of the ruined department-store and host to the Commander-in-Chief of the army, who had moved in with his staff officers, sergeant-majors, clerks, orderlies, sentries and a squad of field gendarmes.

Anyone coming through the narrow gangway from the Theatre Cellar on to the square would pass a few houses on one side of the square and see the high ruin on the opposite corner, the 10.5 cm. haubitzer with the gunners behind it in the gateway, and a double guard of field gendarmes by the entrance. Passing through the gateway he would find himself in the yard, facing a whole pack of figures with tin placards on their chests and healthy full-blooded faces under their steel helmets. In charge of this pack of field gendarmes were two officers.

The field gendarmes, whose duty it was to examine the credentials of all comers and ascertain from each one who he was, where he came from, and to which department and to which officer he wanted to go, were still there; but they no longer functioned precisely, for the cellars of the ruined house not only sheltered Army H.Q., some of them being regimental and battalion battle-positions. The door was thus open to orderlies, runners, and all sorts of people with all sorts of errands, even those who merely claimed to have some errand.

Heavy artillery shells were describing their thundering trajectories. Nearby cracked the shells of tank-guns. A light-rocket hung over the yard, dripping and dripping and illuminating every corner. The army staff, here in their fifth quarters since the encirclement, could move no more; now they were in the midst of it, nailed to the spot. The field gendarmes were in the grip of the same uneasiness that pervaded the whole house. Their eyes, that habitually

fixed on every new arrival with sharpened attention and awakened distrust, turned again and again to the corners of the yard and to the dark hole of the gateway, as if at any moment they expected to see the Unknowns spring up.

Two colonels, a captain, and a medical officer were seeking entry at this moment. One colonel wanted to see the Commander-in-Chief; the other belonged to Army staff; the captain—from an infantry division—had to report to the 2a of the Army; and the medical officer was Viktor Huth.

An agitated doctor out of the Theatre Cellar, bare-headed and without greatcoat, wanted to see the Commander-in-Chief of the Army! At any other time such a demand would have raised an indulgent, amused smile; but at this hour the M.O. without cap or coat was only one in a whole series, one figure among the many that seemed to keep breaking out of the paving-stones in the yard.

A field gendarme, who seemed a little tipsy, said : " Buzz off, there's a good fellow! " But the next moment Huth, with the whole squad of field gendarmes and the others seeking entry, lay stretched out on the clean-swept paving-stones. A grenade had landed in the yard, exploded, and flung its splinters against the walls. Beside Huth lay the colonel belonging to Army Staff. He had overhead Huth's business, and as they stood up again he said : " Come with me, please, Herr Oberarzt."

Guided by the colonel, Huth got past the line of field gendarmes. The two officers of the guard saluted. There were no doors left. A dark cavern opened up. A sloping ramp led into the cellar. Down there it looked like a huge garage. In the centre was a broad runway; right and left were separate sections supported on concrete columns, roofed with concrete and with windows on the outside walls. One third of each window was above ground level, and they were protected from bullets by sandbags. These single sections were separated from the gangway by plank-walls and provided with roughly carpentered doors. Light was burning in the rooms. In the gangway there was light only when one of the doors stood open.

Here, not far from the entrance-ramp, stood Senior-M.O. Huth, waiting for Colonel Carras. It was he who had brought Huth in and told him to wait there. Huth realised that without help he could hardly have got so far, and that without a few words spoken on his behalf he would get no

farther. He stood there waiting, watching the ghostly figures passing to and fro. The gangway, a strange, half-dark lane, was crowded with officers, orderlies, clerks, field gendarmes, bustling through rooms and offices, standing around or sitting along the walls. A familiar picture; the only thing that was new to Huth was the fact that the wave of havoc and the figures seeking refuge had now reached Army H.Q.

The two officers who had entered with Huth knew their way and had already gone on. One, Colonel Steinle, who had seen his whole regiment go under by Yeshovka and now lived in the town-prison, wanted to see the C.-in-C. From the C.-in-C. he wanted precisely what the M.O. wanted : capitulation.

The other, a captain, was General Vennekohl's adjutant. In Vennekhol's absence he had been telephoned by H.Q.: "What else do you need in the way of orders, war-service-crosses, German Crosses, Iron Crosses, Class I?" . . "Well, make out a list and present it." Now he was going to the adjutant of the C.-in-C.

The C.-in-C.'s adjutant was sitting at the table.

"Show me. How many is it?"

It was a long list. The adjutant looked neither at the names nor at the citations. He reached for a box under the bed and counted out the required number of Iron Crosses. The captain wondered how he was going to carry such a lot. An old number of the *Völkischer Beobachter* was found, and with a newspaper cornet full of crosses Vennekohl's adjutant departed.

Next door, in the 1a's room, were the 1a and the 1c of Army H.Q. On the table stood a loaf of rye bread cut into slices which were packed in cellophane. There were also butter, cheese and a tin of French sardines. The two officers were packing their rucksacks; even the remains of the meal they collected up and put in. The 1a opened the door an inch, to see whether the coast was clear. They told their batmen to take the rucksacks to the exit door, then stole after them. The march-route they had decided on for their break-out enterprise led across the Volga. On the other side they planned to go south half-way to Astrakhan, then cross the Volga again and push on to the German Caucasus Army.

A few doors farther along sat the tailor of Roske's

regiment. A heap of clothing lay in front of him : great-coats, field-blouses, slacks, riding-breeches—the whole outfit of Colonel Roske. Yesterday Colonel Roske had been a regimental commander. To-day, as successor to the fallen General Hartmann, he had become commander of the now non-existent Hartmann infantry division; and as such, after a radio message to Berlin and a radioed answer, he had been promoted general. The tailor was in a hurry to detach the rank-badges of colonel from the clothes of Hartmann's successor and sew on shoulder-pieces and collar-badges and gold buttons, and red stripes on the trousers.

General Roske came in. "Pack that up, man! It doesn't matter whether I step into the grave with colonel's or general's badges."

The newly-promoted general, whose left arm had been paralysed in the First World War, and on to whose body whole pieces of flesh had been grafted, had his hands full as master of the shop-ruin and host to the "Army." He had delegated the leadership of the small remnant of his troops, who were fighting in the streets approaching the square, to a major.

The officer from the prison-cellar, Colonel Steinle, walked through the front part of the subterranean gangway, past the telephone and radio exchanges, past the rooms of Intelligence Officer, H.Q. Medical-Officer, and General Roske, and arrived in front of the curtain separating the inner circle of command from the main part of the cellar. Suddenly a door opened and in the bustle of noise there stood before him the one man he particularly wanted to avoid meeting—the Chief of General Staff of the 6th Army.

"And where do you want to go?" demanded the Chief.

"It's absolutely essential for me to see the Commander-in-Chief, Herr General."

"Why absolutely essential? You can't see him! It's quite out of the question. The Field-Marshall has very urgent matters to deal with. He's busy and must on no account be disturbed."

"Herr General, urgent matters in connection with the Army have brought me here to see him."

"I forbid you to go in!"

The curtain opened and a captain came out. "Excuse me, Herr General, for interrupting, but this is urgent." He turned to the Chief of Staff. Both took a step to one

side. "A report, Herr General: the panzer-corps is capitulating."

"After I've spoken to Damme and he gave me his word? Impossible!"

"The report is not from Damme, it's from the commanding general. The commander of the panzer-corps has returned to his quarters, Herr General."

The Chief stood there with his taut, oval face, grey hair, and large, staring eyes; and at this moment of mounting rage his eyes changed colour and flashed like mirrors.

"I? I can do anything, understand anything, see through everything! Others can do nothing, understand nothing, see through nothing! And nobody, whatever his function, has the right to decide for himself!" Thus Colonel Steinle saw the Chief; thus nearly all the officers saw him and knew him. "He's considered a capable brain and a colossal worker, and it's true he makes others do a colossal amount of work," thought Colonel Steinle; "and even when playing cards he keeps everybody around on their toes through a staff of orderly officers. And"—this Colonel Steinle thought as a field-officer—"he's decidedly the typical general staff man, the first one you've got to get past in order to gain entry into the general-staff. Moreover he's completely forgotten me."

The Chief rushed into the orderly-room shouting "Put me through!" and was informed that the line was still being held. Meanwhile Colonel Steinle drew back the curtain—he was not prevented from doing so by the two field gendarmes posted there—and entered that part of the corridor where, next to the Chief's room, H.Q. office, and the office of the Ia and the Ib, were the rooms of the Commander-in-Chief.

The Chief in the orderly-room saw red. He had not even heard that the report was not from General Damme but from the commander of the panzer-corps. He roared into the telephone: "Have you gone mad? If I'd suspected that, Damme, I'd have had you and the whole staff arrested! What, who . . . who are you, a lieutenant?"

At the other end of the wire was no General Damme; not even the commanding general of the panzer-corps. It was a lieutenant, who politely repeated his message: "By order of the commander I have to report to you, Herr General, that the panzer-corps is capitulating at this moment, and after delivering my report I am ordered to

take no answer but to cut the telephone wire, which I shall now do, Herr General."

"I'll have you shot, the whole staff, d'you hear?"

But nothing more was heard at the other end. The wire had, in fact, been cut. The Chief of Army Staff flung the receiver back on the table. An unhealthy flush suffused his face. He rushed out of the room and with long strides paced down the dark gangway as far as the entrance and back. He stumbled over those crouching on the floor and became still more furious.

Colonel Steinle reached the door with the inscription "Commander-in-Chief," found it open, and entered. On a large round table stood a coffee-pot and crockery. The room was empty. Steinle was about to turn round when his eyes fell on a half-open door leading to a darkened closet. Inside he suddenly caught sight of the Field-Marshal. This room was not quite dark; there was the dim light of a radio receiving-set. Seated by it, with his hands on his lap, completely absorbed, sat the Commander-in-Chief, his profile turned to the colonel.

The colonel decided on a softly spoken "Herr Feldmarschall?"

The Field-Marshal looked up and recognised the colonel.

"It's you, Steinle! What news? Please sit down."

He came out of his room and seated himself opposite the colonel. The colonel described the situation on the so-called front and the condition of the expiring unit. On one side sat the field-officer, who had seen a thousand men die that he had known by name; opposite him sat the high general-staff officer, who knew the members of his staff and his commanders by name, but nobody else. For him soldiers were merely a collective whole to be moved this way and that, put in or withdrawn in masses of ten thousand, a hundred thousand, three hundred thousand—mentally and on paper. And in this particular case they must be written off on a scale of three hundred thousand.

There sat the man of the rumbling battle-field, who saw nothing behind him but smoke, snow and corpses, face to face with the man to whom the smoking, roaring débâcle had presented itself on clean, general-staff maps, but who nevertheless—and probably sooner than the colonel—had seen the looming catastrophe from afar. Not for nothing had he acquired an eminent reputation for factual, accurate,

objective, often annoyingly pessimistic judgments of military situations. He had been a general-staff officer from the first, and had served as such in the First World War. Later he had become an instructor at the academy of military science; and in the present war he was made deputy chief of general-staff, proving himself brilliant in the devising and planning of operations. Then, as chief and adviser to the commanders who had the decisions to make, he had suddenly been given an army, had become a leader of troops. Now he had to make decisions himself on a scale scarcely known before. And another aspect of this sudden turn of fate was the Chief allotted to him. This Chief, who should have been his adviser, had reversed the position, and wrenched practically all the power of command to himself.

The colonel gave no news of any importance; and the odour of blood and decay that pervaded the man from the battlefield was merely nauseating to the Commander-in-Chief. He did not need to know of the collapse in its detailed and coarse manifestations. He was well aware what the downfall of his army meant to the further course of the war and to the future after the war : all this he had before his eyes like an open book. Therein lay his particular task : to turn débâcle to glory, defeat to victory, and thus attain the impossible, if not this time then as a preparatory step for a next time. For him at this hour the only important thing was to learn what part the army could play and what gesture the expiring forces were still capable of, in order to give the required heroic example and to impart sanctity to the struggle for power and world-domination. He, personally, had completed his task and foresaw his physical end. His sacrifice was necessary to the great example demanded. At the summit of his career he had the highest mission to fulfil; and this mission came only *through* the Führer, only *through* the hands that were laying themselves on oil and ore and over the map of Europe as far as Asia. It was the direct mission of the Idea which he had served and which had exalted him, the Idea which had been defeated in the First World War and was being defeated in the Second World War. Such, in the hour of his downfall, was the Field-Marshal's judgment of the situation. And—so far as his speculations went—it must triumph in the Third World War.

Twice defeated, they were merely expeditions of robbery;

if the third attempt succeeded the first two would have been stages in the establishment of the Reich's world-mastery and glory. What mattered was not blood and brown heaps of corpses but that future glory. There stood the Field-Marshal, with both feet in a gigantic grave, yet already seeing a future, still greater, nation-wide grave.

The question now was: how would the Army walk the last step? And this was not going quite as planned.

It was not as represented to him by his Chief, who had generalised the "Hartmann case" and radioed to Berlin: "Generals and grenadiers fighting shoulder to shoulder on the railway track with rifle, bayonet and spade."

It was not so. The colonel informed him that "Damme" was no isolated case, that small and large groups were capitulating everywhere on the town boundary. For days, since Gorodishtche and Gumrak, junior commanders had been refusing orders that were beyond the power of their troops. And at this hour it was the same everywhere on the front. A lieutenant says, "I'm going across now too, Herr Hauptmann, I'm chucking it!" The captain asks, "Why chuck it?" "No more food," says the lieutenant, and goes off with ten, twenty, forty men. The captain rings the commander. The commander answers, "There's no such thing as capitulation!" "Yes, I know," says the captain, "they've gone plumb crazy up top!" The commander goes on speaking, but he speaks into emptiness, for the connection is broken, the wire has been cut. The commander sends a squad forward to arrest the captain. The squad reports back that the captain has barricaded himself in his bunker and declared that he will hold out in there till the morning, by which time the Russians will be there! In either case the commander hears nothing more, either from front-line officer or from the squad sent to arrest him: officer and arrest-squad have vanished together.

"That's what it's like in the front line now, Herr Feldmarschall," said the colonel.

"Yes, that's certainly quite, quite different," replied the Field-Marshal.

"There was that break-out order, Herr Feldmarschall."

"Yes, that unfortunate break-out plan!"

The plan had been for the panzer-corps to break out across the Volga, direction east, and for the infantry to break out, direction south, direction north, direction west:

a centrifugal bursting out to all points of the compass. This plan had had to be dropped.

"That plan had no substantial basis and the infantry were entirely against it, Herr Feldmarschall. And its cancellation failed to close the rift between the troops and leadership. It was that order, combined with the external conditions, that started the rot. Now the troops are disintegrating, falling to pieces, to splinters, to chaos. Headquarters is silent. The troops are waiting for just one more order: the order that will work against the chaos and, instead of having odd groups running over into captivity, will bring about the capitulation of the whole."

"Capitulation is forbidden!" The Field-Marshal repeated the words which for many days had been his only answer; and one half of his face again began to twitch.

"But, Herr Feldmarschall, that means driving the troops still farther into chaos. Do you want things to go so far that the men will break into your bunker? They'll come in here and shoot you! Do you want it to come to a revolt before the eyes of the Russians, Herr Feldmarschall?"

"My dear Steinle!" The Field-Marshal stood up, smiled a knowing smile. "It won't come to that, you may be sure, my dear Steinle. And thank you."

With that the colonel was dismissed. With reeling thoughts he moved through the cellar. The Field-Marshal *knew*, the theoretician knew all about what was *practised* there, knew that no revolt need be feared. He already knew what only his sudden smile made the field-officer realise: that the soldier was completely burnt out, that what lay outside among the heaps of rubble was nothing but skin and bone.

. . . .

Colonel Carras had been in the OKH and in the Führer's Headquarters. He had seen the Führer; for a moment he had been privileged to grip an unpleasant, lifeless hand. And for that he is to give his life? A Colonel Carras must lie here in the rubble with all the rest? Spring will come again; the sun will shine again. Colonel Schuster will continue to sit at his desk in the personnel department of the OKH and dish out particularly delicate and honourable missions. In the street he will see the widow Carras; she will be rather pale, but in her black dress she will look wonderfully *chic*. At the same hour, while the rubble is

being cleared away, a dusty skeleton will be pulled out, put on a cart, and presently thrown on a big pile in a balka. "Wanderer, if thou comest to Germany, tell that thou hast seen us lying here." . . . No, thank you, thank you very much indeed! Yes, if one could have been the wanderer, if that had been the "particularly honourable mission"—that would have been a different matter altogether!

What did this "particularly honourable mission" really consist of? The same as every one of those five dozen who had flown in had to do here, namely to say: "We've seen so many troops on the way, in Schachty, in Mariupol, in Rostov. There are panzer troops from Africa, infantry divisions from France, from Yugoslavia, from Norway—white-painted tanks and gun-barrels, Belgian artillery-horses, all on the way, and so on, and so on . . ." What else but to sit here in the Army Staff and pour such stuff into the ears of generals? They'd have done better to send Paul Hörbiger or Cläre Waldoff into the ring—and for all he cared he could have lain there. But no! Colonel Carras was the chosen morale lifter, Colonel Carras, a man of recognised social qualities who, if he was sometimes in a bad humour, never showed it. Now he was to stay there and die a genuine Spartan death while the ungenuine and fat Leonidas in Berlin had taken off his false Spartan or Nibelungen beard—he got everything mixed up—and forgotten all about it.

Carras had been outside, had run across the chalk-white illuminated square and risked being killed by the rain of bread-filled and sausage-filled bombs. He had been to see Roske's regiment. At one point at least the Russians were within four hundred metres of Army Staff. Mortar-fire was already landing in the courtyard. And coming back Carras had lain on the paving-stones beside that M.O. from the Theatre Cellar.

The doctor was right, of course. The white flag—that would put a stroke through the epic composed in Berlin. The wounded must not die, that would be utterly senseless. So Carras had taken the man in with him. He would take the matter up, see it through, then accompany the doctor back to his cellar and help to conduct the capitulation there. Yes, that was what would happen, that was what must happen. That was the one ray of light in deepest night.

Carras left the doctor behind and ran through the cellar,

through the throng of people. through offices, through the 1a's and 2a's rooms. He returned to his ray of light to the doctor, and told him that they must be patient, that all the officers concerned were frightfully busy at the moment. And in fact they were. Not to mention the C.-in-C., who was colossally overburdened—Carras had seen it as he passed by—and was sitting there like a reed bending to the storm.

The Chief—Carras had opened the Chief's door and immediately pulled it to again—was roaring into the telephone; "I'll have the whole staff from general to lieutenant shot on the spot!"

The 1a and 1c had shut themselves up in a room and there was no admittance there. Carras enquired next door of the chief of an intelligence section, politely and with few words, with a significant little finger movement in the direction of his temple and a questioning look towards the next room.

"No, they've no such intention," was the answer. "They've been sitting down to their last breakfast, but they've been packing and they've had the map of the left bank of the Volga and the Kirgis steppe brought to them."

"And you, gentlemen, are you going across the Volga too?" (The intelligence chief with the commander of H.Q. Signals were also engaged in packing their rucksacks.)

"No, Herr Oberst, we don't want any détours; we're taking the direct route to the west," they answered.

Well, in that direction they'd find the shortest way to hell anyway! But what about the 1a and the 1c. If the 1a were a wolf and the 1c a wolf-cub they might have some prospect of reaching Germany via the Kirgis steppe. But setting out like that, with a bottle of cognac and a rucksack full of bread? *Mein Gott!*

Ten days ago Carras had observed the creeping paralysis of this house. But he had never thought it would come to this sort of individual manifestation. "Individual," he said to himself. "in the last five minutes I have seen quite a number of such cases. Here I am in the midst of a lot of prison-breakers. The 1a does a bunk and leaves Army H.Q. in the lurch; the signals commander and the intelligence chief do likewise. With packed rucksacks they steal away in secret across the Volga to the Kirgis, across the Karpovka to the Kalmuks. All one can do is to call after them good luck!"

From behind the curtain came new sayings of the oracle. "It is not dishonourable to turn one's weapon against oneself." So revolver shots rang out. "It is not dishonourable to attempt a break-out at the last moment." So rucksacks and valises, even suitcases, were feverishly packed. "It is not dishonourable to be taken prisoner." Even that was hawked around—a pronouncement whose authenticity had yet to be confirmed, for up to now and in writing it was still: "Negotiators are to be driven off by firing," and "Capture means an agonising death or a living hell in Siberia."

The Chief of Staff still raged through all the rooms. Where he caught sight of a rucksack there was a shindy, and if anybody got caught negotiating with the Russians he was for the firing party, and talking about the cellar oracle wouldn't save him. For this house, and for all staff-quarters, the order was still in force: "The battle-position will be defended to the last bullet." No man with discipline in him hawked any sayings around; he hoarded hand-grenades under his desk and in his sleeping-bag. Carras had come upon a number of gentlemen engaged in such useful activity, even if with some of them it was only preparation for an exotic suicide. But the Chief's office—so an orderly officer had assured him—had not yet been turned into a weapon-store, much less into a fortified citadel.

Carras again stood in the ante-room of the Chief. This time there was no need to open the door; the row was audible through the closed door. To Carras's look of enquiry the officer on duty shrugged his shoulders, then he explained that there was a very obstinate lieutenant on the telephone for the umpteenth time, demanding that Army H.Q. give to the groups fighting in the vicinity of Town Command, who had no idea under whose orders they were, the command to cease fire.

The Chief came out of his room, white with rage, strode to the curtain, jerked it back and roared along the corridor to the duty sergeant-major of the field gendarmerie: "Sergeant-Major! A squad! Lawkow's the fellow's name, a Lieutenant Lawkow. I make you responsible. Bring the fellow here. I want to see him.

"He called the Chief a murderer," the orderly officer told Carras. Again it was not the moment for Carras to speak to the Chief. Moreover with the Theatre Cellar, as

with Town Command, it concerned an ambulance-station.

Once more Carras wandered about the premises, looking into rooms in which meals were being taken. After five moves the "Army" was as poor as a church mouse. The Hartmann division, however, was in its old quarters and still had stocks; and to-night was the night of the great "eat-and-drink-up-the-rest." Even the officers of the "Army," who also wanted to be in the party, strolled through the rooms of the "Hartmänner." On one of these strolls Carras met his double. At any rate, the other officers maintained that the chief of Army Intelligence was the image of him. It was rather embarrassing to stand looking oneself in the eyes, especially as the "self" or double seemed to be doing something with a pistol. However, there was no need for alarm; the intelligence chief applied the safety-catch and slipped the pistol into his trousers pocket

"Imagine it," he said. "I'm on my way to organise a breakfast for my men, and there's my adjutant with this thing in his hand again, safety-catch back, all set for a click-bang finish! Well, I took it away from him. Whether that's any use I don't know. I can't stay with him all the time and forbid him to play with fire. I've got other patients, and I've got my own worries too, at a time like this!"

"The adjutant, that's the big, strong, healthy-looking fellow, isn't it?"

"That's right. Think of it—got a charming wife, only married her just before the ring closed, in Belgrade, daughter of a big industrialist. And a fellow like that takes up the pistol!"

"Your adjutant, if memory serves me right, was what they call a 'pillar of faith," wasn't he?"

"I'll say he was! Pillar of faith! If I dropped a word of doubt about Hooth or Manstein, or called 'Operation Thunderclap' a raving lunacy, up he'd jump: 'Herr Oberst, I can't help saying it, your view of the situation is positively insufferable!' Pillar of faith—a hundred per cent. believer, believes in the sacredness of the Wehrmacht's radio reports, believes everything devoutly. Now for the last five days he's been utterly broken, sits there with his head in his hands, and when he manages to unclench his teeth he says: 'All lies! The whole thing's a swindle!' Curses and broods on revenge. I say to him: 'Take down

the Reichmarschall's speech.' Suddenly writing-block and pencil fly into the corner and he rushes out with a face as white as chalk. I find him again and have to snatch this thing away from him. There's breakdown for you!"

"And what are you going to do yourself? asked Carras.

"And what are *you* going to do yourself?" returned his double.

Both showed their teeth, both smiled. The chief of intelligence said: "Now we've got to the parlour game: Get captured—shoot myself? Get captured—shoot myself? Well, first I'll get something to eat for my men. By the way, the order is: 'To the last bullet.'"

The Chief passed by. Both followed him with their eyes, then their eyes met again. This time they did not show their teeth, nor did they smile.

The intelligence chief remarked: "Listen. Just now I went into him and said: 'Herr General, I have to report that such and such a lot have disappeared.' Of course I expected the worst. But he only shook hands and said: 'We can't do anything about it now.' What do you make of that sudden softening?"

"I don't believe in his roaring and I don't believe in his apparent calmness," said Carras. As he spoke he caught sight of the man in the long trousers with the red stripe of a general striding along with a great show of serenity, and he realised that it was really only pretence.

The intelligence chief said: "In my opinion the man's secretly at the end of his tether." And he walked away.

Carras remained standing. Through the long gangway, with grey light falling on it from the doorways, he looked at the figures wandering to and fro or crouching on the floor. To the right of the gangway lay a heap of rifle-ammunition and hand-grenades, to the left a heap of mines. The engine of the small Bosch accumulator for the radio-station was puffing and filling the air with blue vapour. Doors opened. Orderlies came out and forced their way through the crowd. There were shouts from the field gendarmes, and answers:

"Pass along! Don't stand still!"

"Shut your snout!"

"Who was that?"

"Where are you trying to go?"

"To the regimental battle-position."

"What are you crouching there for?"

"Want to see the regimental M.O."

"Get on, get on! Pass along!"

Again a door crashed open. The pile of sandbags in front of the window of the room had collapsed on the explosion of a grenade, and a few men had to go out into the yard to build them up again. For a moment wind and snow blew through the room and into the gangway. More shouts, more falling sandbags. Above, in the house-ruin over the cellar, there was a clattering and rumbling as of a heavy object bouncing down a hundred steps, followed by the detonation of a heavy mortar-bomb.

Against the wall crouched figures that already had the game "Get captured—shoot myself?" behind them, and were indifferent to shells bursting above or in the yard or even at the end of the long gangway. They sat there in complete apathy, thinking their thoughts or no longer thinking. They were finally convinced of the futility of any action, whether it was the performance of duty, looking after their men, or trying to do something for the wounded in the neighbouring cellars. They simply sat there, incapable of rising.

"Fight to the last bullet?" thought Colonel Carras. "Under this Chief and in this house full of magnificently decorated lunatics! Pardon me, gentlemen—you with warm feet and cool heads, tacticians, strategists, specialists, experts in all branches—this is the last metamorphosis, the last task, the final wreath pressed on the pallid brow. *Mein Gott!* Twenty years an officer, with promotion step by step, parades and glory and triumph, a victorious march through a Continent—and such an end, a *danse macabre* in the light of exploding hand-grenades, in the flash of cold steel! And in the end his own revolver pointed at the temple of Colonel Carras! Tell that thou hast seen us. . . . *Mein Gott*, no, no, no!"

Colonel Carras got moving, ran after the Chief, found him in the office, stood before him, held a short conversation, and ran out again to M.O. Huth.

"Doctor, I think now's the time. I think now the gentlemen are ready."

In front there was a clattering, and more explosions; this time it was grenades. Perhaps twenty minutes had passed, so long Huth had been sitting there. He did not know who the various people were who had passed by him. He did not know that the front-line officer he had entered with

had left with a paper cornet full of decorations. He did not know that the colonel he had come in with was returning from a visit to the Field-Marshal, though he saw that he was terribly shaken. He did not know that the tall man in the white camouflage combination, white cloth outside and white fur inside, who was handed an equally white rucksack at the exit door, was the Ia of the Army; that the younger man, also in white, who followed him, was the Ic; and that the two of them were at that moment setting out into the unknown. Huth got up, cast a glance into first one room and then another, and in both of them saw groups of high officers sitting together. But he could not know that there before him he had the two factions of the house, one gathered round Hartmann's successor, the newly-promoted General Roske, and the other round the C.-in-C.'s adjutant and the Army interpreter. Neither did he know that in addition to their own worries the chief concern of both groups was to keep the Field-Marshal in a good humour and to have the rarest delicacies that the ration-store could still produce placed on the Field-Marshal's table.

Senior-M.O. Huth had observed the apathetic figures against the wall and noticed that here the cause was not muscular atrophy, not phthisis, not dysentery; that the paralysis here was a phenomenon of purely psychological origin. He had seen the Chief puffed out like a turkey; he had seen officers moving up and down the long corridor bathed in grey light, among them some rare "big bugs"—doctors, vets, court-martial officers with the rank of general; officers with gold or silver shoulder-pieces on backgrounds of red, blue, green and black; officers, inspectors, advisers, officials, clerks, among them the dog-heads of the field gendarmes; a gigantic apparatus which for weeks had produced nothing but the one word: "Hold!" The gigantic brain, the grey matter of the Army, was undergoing morbid changes. One could see the deformity with the naked eye, observe it in single cells in such variations as melancholy, eccentricity, paranoia, hypochondria, raving, moodiness, weakened powers of judgment, and a host of subvarieties of idiopathy and insanity. This Army centre was in the throes of death, disintegrating, paralysed. Such was the diagnosis of Dr. Viktor Huth, who had come in here and waited twenty minutes. And at the root of the sickness and untimely death—Huth arrived at

this conclusion too—was that abject, slavish surrender of free will.

Huth looked up. In front of him stood Carras. For the first time Huth noticed that the colonel had green eyes and that there was a green tinge over his whole face. Hallucination? No, it was not that. What Huth saw was the manifestation of a state of mind, the face of a man in deep water. But there was also a flash of determination to live on in spite of everything. That was a strong and healthy instinct which the doctor trusted and to which he entrusted his cause. And his cause, measured by the needs of the hour, was little enough. The situation called for a stern demand for the capitulation of the whole army, and he knew that he was not big enough to make that demand. But since for days the leaving behind of the wounded had been planned, he wanted to demand the capitulation of the Theatre Cellar, and to see it carried out.

"*Jahwol*, Herr Oberst, I'm ready."

Huth walked beside Carras through the overcrowded gangway. The curtain was drawn back. As he was in the company of Colonel Carras the field gendarmes standing right and left of the curtain let the M.O. pass without challenge. He passed by an office, by a staircase barricaded with sandbags, and reached the door of the Chief of General Staff. As Carras opened the door heavy mortar-bombs thundered behind him and beyond the curtain at the other end of the cellar. Huth stepped with Carras through the ante-room and stood before the Chief.

The Chief sat behind his desk. A man with an energetic face and eyes that gleamed. Huth at first thought of morphia, but then attributed this rigid gleam to a tense and overwrought state of mind. Not so much Huth, but Carras and the two other officers present, who up to now had seen the Chief fly into a rage at the mere mention of the word "capitulation," and threatened generals who spoke of it with shooting, now experienced no small surprise.

The Chief did not take his eyes off the doctor. What he was thinking it was impossible to judge. But he let the doctor speak, let him say things he had never tolerated before. Once he turned his head and listened to the now constant bursting of grenades outside, then went on listening to Huth.

When Huth finished, the surprise of the officers present turned to hostile astonishment as they heard the Chief

say to him : " Take a seat, please, Doctor, and wait a few minutes."

The Chief left the room, went to the adjutant of the Commander-in-Chief, called the H.Q. Interpreter outside and exchanged a few words with him. He sent for Hartmann's successor, General Roske, and had a short conversation with him. He sent an orderly officer to the neighbouring ruin to summon the artillery-commander there, to whose command the ruins of the Red Army House and the adjacent Theatre Cellar belonged. Then he stood at the door of the Field-Marshal. But with his hand raised to knock he changed his mind, dropped his hand and withdrew.

And this tall Stalingrad ruin, the faces within its walls, the happenings in the store-rooms and cellars, the last throes of an Army Headquarters : let that not be forgotten! And the conversation between the Chief of the Army and Interpreter and General, concerning the handing over not only of the Theatre Cellar but also of Army Headquarters —at a time when men were dying all around as men had been dying for seventy-seven days, because they were still bound by the never-cancelled order, " To the last bullet! " : let that too not be forgotten!

. . . . .

" The wounded streaming toward Stalingrad will be assembled in the building of Town Command Centre and there provided for," said one of the last Army orders.

It was already growing dark as Chief Staff-Medical-Officer Simmering with the procession of wounded from Gumrak turned into the big gateway and came up the yard. When the wounded Lieutenant Lawkow came through the entrance into the yard there were stars in the sky, the walls of the building towered blue into the night, and the heap thrown in front of the ground-floor windows, which had already drawn the eyes of the Chief Staff-M.O. and his procession of wounded, was recognisable only by its odd curves with here and there a protruding limb. This heap, piled up as high as a man, stretched from the drive to the corner of the yard, and from the corner to the door of the side wing; and beyond the door it continued again. The house, long as it was, was surrounded by a wall of corpses.

Chief Staff-M.O. Simmering halted. The wounded he was bringing, except those who were still in the courtyard

or out in the street, also halted. Without command they turned left, and stood with heads and eyes that wanted to turn away yet could not, that had to stare hard at outstretched fingers, a distorted leg, white teeth in a gaping mouth, at the whole jettisoned heap. They stood there, the "assembled," in a silent row facing those who had yesterday been assembled and had gone in here across the yard.

"But, Sergeant, will you explain to me——"

Chief Staff-M.O. Simmering addressed a medical sergeant who with a medical orderly was handing out a stretcher with a dead man on it towards the heap, where two others took it from them.

"*Ach*, Herr Oberstabarzt!" said the sergeant, and made a helpless gesture with his hand. It meant: "Don't stop there, come inside and you won't need any explanation."

"Has the yard always been like this, Sergeant?"

"Not up to four days ago, Herr Oberstabarzt. But there's no hope of burying them now because of the firing and the frozen ground. We've been laying the bodies in the shed over there, but now the shed's filled to the roof, and the men keep streaming in, more and more of them. The medical company's got nothing else to do but carry out the dead, and they can't manage them all, there are too many."

That was the situation when Chief Staff-M.O. Simmering arrived.

When Lawkow arrived he was only one of many who came along singly, from Stalingrad balkas, from holes in ruins, from the white snow-waste outside. They all recoiled at this gruesome heap with the starlight lying on it like a cloud. But where could they go? Back to their holes, back to the snowy waste? Darkness, loneliness, hunger had driven them thence. Here was the place designated by the "Army"; here they hoped to get some horse-soup if nothing else. So they turned their attention away from the heap. This heap was another matter; those lying there had just been unlucky. Those who arrived here still moved on their own feet, still hoped. So they crowded the doorway. The shattered arm in its first bandage, the broken bone, the wounded side hurt so that one had to howl; but they forced their way through and finally got into the house, if no farther than the stairs.

So far Lieutenant Lawkow had got. So far Major Buchner with his Lieutenant Loose had got. But Major

Buchner forced his way in farther. He did not manage to force his way to a doctor, but he found a medical sergeant-major. Not till he had made sure that the sergeant-major was having his lieutenant carried away did the major go out again. Not till he was outside under the sky and in the cold air did he hear the shrieking that was so deafening and strange in the interior of the house that one failed to understand and wondered where one was. Were those human beings, or were they huge captive birds perched in cages three stories high and in three wings of the building, fluttering against walls and ceilings and falling back in dark masses with bleeding beaks and broken wings to utter wild, incomprehensible cries? Was it a huge tower of dying birds? Was it stable after stable of burning horses, snorting and tearing at their chains and collapsing in thudding heaps? Were they, could they be, a thousand human beings?

When Buchner was outside in the street again with his men, the shrieking and fluttering still in his ears, and the heap he had just walked past still before his eyes, then he knew the answer: it was Death. And with this knowledge in his heart he strode silently ahead of his men, neither hastening nor slowing his pace, heeding neither mortar-fire nor salvos of artillery, till he reached the steam-mill.

Lieutenant Loose had been carried inside. A medical examination was unnecessary. In this house there were only two categories of sick and wounded men: those who could walk and those who could not. The sergeant-major decided to which category a new arrival belonged. In Lieutenant Loose's case the shrapnel-tattered trouser-leg and the one bloody rag that was a shirt bound round his leg, made the decision a simple matter.

"Take him into the corridor," said the sergeant-major.

The stretcher-bearers carried Loose there and laid him at the end of a row of stretcher-cases.

Though Lieutenant Loose had been through the war, had lain in holes and mud and accustomed himself to a coarse soldier-tone, he was still a well-bred young man; and as such he at first waited patiently. After waiting a long time he asked a medical orderly when he was going to be taken to the doctor. The medical orderly did not know. No doctor came, neither was Loose taken to a doctor. There came only two orderlies who lifted his stretcher and shifted him a little farther along. This procedure was repeated

several times. Behind him the row grew endlessly and he gradually moved forward. The corridor was very long; it was pitch dark and miserably cold. Doors must have been open somewhere. Lieutenant Loose asked for them to be closed. But everything remained as it was, dark and cold, as if the wind of the open field were howling through the corridor. All that happened to him was that he kept being shifted one or several paces forward. Those lying in front and behind he could not see. He heard calling, heard screaming; but most of them lay in rigid silence. Somewhere there was shooting going on; he could hear that too. He was shifted forward again and suddenly caught sight of the end of the corridor. There was no door, the corridor led to no operating table, it led nowhere. There was only a square as high and wide as the corridor; beyond and in this square was nothing but sky, which with its coldness was rushing through the corridor. What had happened to the men who had been moved forward before him? Suddenly it occurred to Loose that the stretcher-bearers had been coming back all the time with empty stretchers. In front was nothing but the hole without window-frame. What had happened to the men?

Lieutenant Loose was not unconscious or apathetic like most of those lying here. A few hours before he had been at the Tartar Wall and had come over the airfield. His leg was shattered and he could not move, but otherwise he was a healthy man with blood circulating and nerves intact. There he lay. Another twenty or thirty men, he estimated, lay in front of him.

"Take me away from here!" he demanded. "Take me to a doctor or to another room! I won't stay here!"

The stretcher-bearers shifted him another place forward and vanished in the darkness. He was tied there, his shattered leg nailed him to the spot. There was the sky and the howling wind; it was cold, and his nose and fingers were like ice. Then his fear became overwhelming and Lieutenant Loose began to scream. He yelled so loudly that at any other time staff-medical-officer, chief staff-medical-officer, the whole house would have come running up. Now his voice was only one in a shrieking babel, and nothing happened.

. . . . .

Lieutenant Lawkow had also got into the house. He looked for a field-kitchen, and found one in a cellar.

Bunches of soldiers hung about the cellar steps; he must get past them. He was small and agile; to a coarse word he knew a still coarser answer; and so he got to the "goulash cannon." He received a mug of hot water; for days this had been the only nourishment to be had there. Lawkow poured the hot water into his belly. He would have remained sitting in the vicinity of the "goulash cannon," mainly for the sake of warmth, but also because it was the best observation post. And one never knew—in case anything else came along it was as well to be on the spot.

But the cellar was being cleared, and the fact that Lawkow took part in the "clearing" availed him nothing. The field gendarmes pushing the men up the stairs threw him out, too. However, he was able to avoid the stairs; he escaped into the corridor and strolled through the cellars. To be precise, he did not actually stroll. He climbed over bodies outstretched or crouching against the walls and worked his way forward step by step.

These were big cellar rooms, cave after cave. And the people that had collected here! There were stragglers, officers and men, Croats and Italians, drivers, grooms, looters, construction troops, men entirely without leaders. There were fighting troops too, with their quarters and firing-stands with machine-guns in position. There was the company of field gendarmes left here by Town Command. There were Dutchmen and Walloons. A fellow with broad cheeks addressed Lawkow in strange-sounding German. He wanted to know, now that the place had become a hospital, whether it was going to capitulate and whether the capitulation had already begun. And there were shots, but one couldn't tell if they were out of the cellar-windows or outside in the street, or if they were the shots of suicides. There were sick men, some with dysentery, too weak to stand, doing their business on the spot. Officers crouched among them or waded their way across the sick men. Some days before these officers had been with their staffs; they had not yet seen how dysentery cases die, and they were shocked at the "shameless behaviour." But what were they doing here? Like the Dutchman they were waiting for the capitulation, and they wanted to be in it. A general was there too, an artillery-commander, entirely unaccompanied; he was there for the same reason as the others, and he had claimed a cellar-room to himself. But others

had invaded it. A crowd of weary men, wrapped in bandages and rags, had flooded into the room and taken possession of it in a moment. Among these grey figures from the front that sank down on forms, against walls, on the floor, Lawkow saw the man in the long trousers with the red stripe, saw his bloated face and heard his hasty words. But it was no stern order. The men were nothing but a solid stew; one could put one's hand in it and it did not move. The general sank back in his chair. He seemed resigned to the intrusion, content to be there at all.

Some soldiers were pressing round a captain.

"Herr Hauptmann, there's a lieutenant in with us. He's already been here a week, and he's pinched our rations for the third time."

"Where did you get rations from?"

"Our squad's been broken up, the sergeant gave out what was left."

The captain was the leader of the fighting group in the cellar. The men were the wounded of a dispersed cyclist-company. The captain had the lieutenant pointed out to him. The lieutenant looked little different from the smoke-stained wall he was leaning against.

"Herr Oberleutnant!" The lieutenant scarcely raised his head. "Can't you stand up? Are you wounded?"

The lieutenant was not wounded. He stood up. He was a tall fellow, utterly unkempt, and not in his clothes alone. His name was Wedderkop; that was all the captain could get out of him. He could not discover what unit he belonged to.

"The men say you've taken their rations."

"Yes, I have."

"Oh, have you? As an officer you've robbed the men?"

"If Herr Hauptmann likes to call it that."

"Well, Herr Oberleutnant, have you got a gun?"

"No, I don't need one."

"Very well, my driver will bring you one."

"And you clear out for a bit! You can come in again in two minutes," the captain said to the men.

The men left the cellar-hole. The driver came, entered the room and came out again. Two minutes passed. Twice, three times, this was repeated. Each time the driver reported to his captain: "Not done it yet." The fourth time it was done, but not as had been intended. A shot rang out, and Lawkow noticed the driver sticking his

smoking pistol back into his holster as he closed the door behind him.

"Right, you can go in again," the driver said to the men standing around; and to his captain he reported: "Done it, Herr Hauptmann."

Lieutenant Lawkow came across another old acquaintance here, his last battalion-commander, Captain Henkel—actually only an episodic figure in the battalion. Counting on the early relief of the 6th Army he had got himself flown in because he wanted to have been "there." But running into the collapse at Pitomnik he had found the situation utterly different from what he had imagined. It had been too much for him; he had vanished as suddenly as he had appeared, and was seen no more. Now Lawkow met him again, and he looked little different from Lieutenant Wedderkop.

"*Ach*, my dear fellow!" cried Henkel. "I *am* glad to see you again!"

"I'm not glad, Herr Hauptmann!"

"I still can't understand what made me come to Stalingrad when I had a suitable post with my printing-unit in Kharkhov. I'm not so ambitious, you know, I didn't want to command a battalion at all. . . ."

Lawkow wandered on through the cellars.

There was a surgery, an operating-room. In one corner lay a surgeon, both legs black. He well knew that if a fire broke out it was all up with him. He lay there smoking a cigarette and chatting with his neighbour about Göttingen, where both had studied.

The commander of the fighting group was assembling his men. Outside in the street, which could be seen through a window-hole camouflaged with stones, were the flashes of an infantry battle.

A sergeant was taking leave of his captain: "If you get back to Vienna, Herr Hauptmann, please give my love to the widow Kumitsch." The captain called after him: "Don't talk bilge, Kumitsch!" But Lawkow saw the sergeant go off with the peculiar gait that he already knew.

. . . . .

Since his arrival Chief Staff-M.O. Simmering had been the senior doctor in the Town Command building. He sat in the doctors' room and, as the Staff-M.O. in charge could not be reached, he got Staff-M.O. Bäumler to give him a general picture of the situation. The other doctors

were allocated to different sections of the house. As Bäumler informed him, medical activity now consisted only in speaking words of comfort, while the work of the personnel consisted of continually carrying the dead down into the yard.

The remnants of a few medical companies and about twenty doctors were employed here. When Bäumler arrived four days previously there were over a thousand half-starved, seriously wounded men in the house ; up to now they had not been fed nor had anybody troubled about them. How many there were at the moment could not be ascertained. The house was full to its utmost capacity. The wounded lay unprotected on the floor, in the corridors, on the stairs and in the wrecked rooms up to the third storey. The cellar-rooms were crowded out, partly by a fighting group, partly by a strong force of field gendarmes, and by refugees and stragglers. So far there had been no fighting for the house itself ; but fighting was going on in the neighbouring ruins, and in consequence grenades and tank-shells occasionally struck the house, bursting through the thin walls and causing casualties. Medical supplies and food were exhausted. Such was the content of Staff-M.O. Bäumler's report.

Simmering asked Bäumler to conduct him through the house, taking the cellars first. He looked into the over-crowded rooms of the stragglers, into the quarters of the field gendarmes, and into the firing-positions of the fighting troop. He said nothing, but merely shook his head. The way then led up the staircase. This staircase was like an Underground escalator in the rush hour, and they had to wind their way through the throng. The only difference was that the people were not standing upright but sitting with legs outstretched or drawn under them, heads supported in hands, or leaning against the next man, eyes open or closed, awake or sleeping. Men were still wearing their first pus-encrusted bandages. From top to bottom the staircase was permeated with the foul stench of decay. Simmering went through the first, second and third floors. Everywhere was the same: wounded men, dead men, men with typhus, all jammed together and on top of one another, gasping and groaning ; men screaming, men weeping, men praying, men roaring in delirium ; men begging for tea, for a mouthful of water, all feverish, all wanting to drink—but the water was melted snow and there was not enough

for all. Men demanding a pistol and getting one somehow, from somebody. Empty window-holes gaped in the rooms, beyond them the night with its stars. The occupants of the rooms tore up floor-boards and made open fires around which they crouched. The red gleam of light attracted the fire of enemy artillery, and whole rooms with their occupants were blown into the air. Exploding grenades poisoned the air with sulphur.

Simmering stepped to one of the window-holes and looked down into the street. The house itself was apparently not fighting. But the fighting troops had their position here, and down there in the dark street they were flitting to and fro and firing out of the neighbouring ruins. And there was something else. On the other side, the side of the square, batches of limping figures were visible, moving painfully along and slowly approaching the courtyard of the house. The stream of wounded seeking aid had not yet ceased.

Simmering went back. On the first floor he spoke with some medical orderlies and met the staff-M.O. in charge. The orderlies declared that they could no longer keep up with the work. "They keep freezing to death. And on top of that there's one wave of suicide after another going through the house."

The M.O. in charge, whom Simmering had known in Berlin but had not seen since, turned to him as if up to now they had been working in the same operating-theatre. "Just as I'm about to start work, in comes a tank-shell and tears both my surgeon's hands off!" And away he went, vanished in the gleam of the open fires, amid smoke and sulphurous air.

"Well, Herr Stabsarzt, we must make a start," said Simmering. "But tell me, what sort of arrangement's that?" he asked, stepping into the corridor and indicating the high double doors that reached to the ceiling. These doors were wide open and fastened with cords, and it was evidently the same at the other end, for an icy draught swept through the long corridor and over the patients lying on stretchers.

"There's nothing else we can do with the hopeless cases, Herr Oberstabsartz. We can only lay them there to die a quick and painless death from cold. And it gives us a chance to make room for the impatient crowd of slightly wounded."

" Is that the first aid given here? "

" The most humane, it seems to me, Herr Oberstabsartz."

Both doctors returned to the cellar. Meanwhile, most of the other doctors had gathered in the doctors' room. Chief Staff-M.O. Simmering addressed them.

" As you are aware, gentlemen," he began, " the veto on capitulation is still in force. But what we are allowed to do, and what in my opinion is the most urgent task at this moment, is to make the house recognisable as a hospital by means of Red Cross flags. That means that only those may seek refuge under this flag who are either wounded or sick or belong to the medical-corps personnel. The house must therefore be cleared of fighting troops, field gendarmes and all unwounded stragglers. That is our first and most important task, and for that, gentlemen, I ask your help."

Lieutenant Lawkow noticed a new movement in the cellar. On one side there was a new invasion of wounded men—men with stumps, one-legged men, some with arms in splints, some in weeks-old plaster corsets as black as their faces. On the other side, moving out under protest, with loud expressions of dismay, or in silent resignation, went former inmates—figures like Lieutenant Wedderkop or Lawkow's one-time battalion commander, Henkel, or the man in civilian clothes who declared that he wasn't a soldier at all but a railway official who had been brought over from Paris to take over Stalingrad station as station-master.

" Really most regrettable, and we should have been delighted to see you with a red cap at the station," said Lawkow, who was helping the doctors with the general eviction and the resultant arguments. " But you've got to get out ; this really isn't a railway-station, mein Herr."

" I protest at not having been flown out!"

" You're right again there, but this isn't the place for that either. You'd best lodge that protest with the commander-in-chief of the Luftwaffe."

" Hurry up and pick up your suitcase," interposed one of the field gendarmes, who were also helping to clear the cellar.

Though Simmering had feared otherwise, the field gendarmes had agreed with surprising alacrity to leave the house. " We can't let ourselves be taken prisoner. Since our job has made us known to so many of the civilian

population there's nothing for it but to fight to the last cartridge." That was the consideration that decided them to vacate their quarters without resistance. The fighting troops, too, left in a body after a conversation between the Chief Staff-M.O. and their commander.

The clearing of the cellar progressed. Room after room was vacated by the men, with rucksack and valise, or empty-handed just as they were. The places thus freed were immediately taken possession of by the wounded streaming in. But the whole operation had begun several days too late. The gun-fire on the house was getting heavier. The thundering of the explosions penetrated to the cellars. It was not enough that all firing from the house had ceased. What was needed was for the troops in the immediate vicinity to cease fire. But that required the order of the commander of that sector of the town; and it was impossible to transmit it from Town Command since all telephone communication to the building had been destroyed. Some liaison outside the building would have to be effected; and Lawkow offered to accompany and assist the senior M.O. who undertook this task.

Meanwhile the group of doctors had arrived at the general's cellar-hole. Lawkow and the senior M.O., curious to know how the affair would develop, waited to see the general move out. Evidently the general had no intention of giving up his quarters. The doorway was surrounded by soldiers, and Lawkow was unable to approach very close. The field gendarmes stood silently by, awaiting developments. Inside, an argument was going on between the doctors and the general. It became necessary to call in the help of Chief Staff-M.O. Simmering. From the soldiers outside came cries of "He won't come out! Not on your life! He means to stay there!"

Again the earth trembled, again the building shook to its foundations. For a moment the cellar listened to something else than the voices of the chief staff-M.O. and the general. The Lawkow heard: "At last he's beginning to pack." A doctor coming out of the room said: "We've had to use some pretty strong arguments."

This was enough for Lawkow, and it was enough for the senior M.O. They had no need to wait while the general packed. They made their way upstairs, across the yard and out into the white rumbling night.

An hour-and-a-half later Lawkow returned. He was

alone. The senior M.O. had been laid low by artillery fire. The stars were no longer visible. Salvos of artillery flashed in the mist. Out of the darkness at the other end of the square towered the building of the Town Command, a huge stone head, hacked and mutilated, smoke pouring out of the eyes, and the eyes were red. Lawkow passed by a firing 2 cm. flak-gun and a defence-line blocking the street. It was one of the groups that were still fighting without knowing what they were fighting for; nor was it ascertainable under whose command they were. They lay behind wreckage and bits of wall, simply because they had always lain somewhere when anything showed itself in front. It did not occur to them that their shooting was drawing fire and causing the destruction of a house full of wounded men.

"What are you fools lying there for?" Lawkow asked one group.

"Well, where are we to go? In there and get nothing to eat, and die of hunger?" was the answer.

That was the only explanation. They lay there because, so long as they were "front line," they could always count on getting something to eat; otherwise, as they well knew, they would never get another bite. Of course there was a captain there in the heap of ruins. He had received orders to hold the line, and he was doing so, or trying to. Over the captain there was a colonel, but he was not to be found. And over the colonel—there began the confusion. Gönnern in the sappers' ruin, Vennekohl in the balka, Damme in the prison-cellar—none of them would admit having given the order and none of them would take it back.

Lawkow returned by a détour to the rear of Town Command. He climbed in through a window and entered a long corridor in which lay stretcher after stretcher. The way was blocked partly by wall wreckage, but more by a hanging curtain of burning beams. The reflection of the fire played on the faces of the men lying on the stretchers and made them look rosy and alive. Lawkow had to go back. He crept through a hole into a room, through a mass of moaning and praying humanity that was nothing more than a confused heap of feverish, howling lungs gasping for air, and reached another room. This was a cul-de-sac, so he turned round. But now he could not get back. There were heads, arms, legs and smoke, and over

all was the impending catastrophe. The roof-beams still held, but there was no telling how long they would hold. Unable to get back, Lawkow himself now became a creature of howling lungs and violent pain. He did not know whether he was on his feet or on his head; it seemed as though the wave of struggling humanity had flung him against the ceiling and let him fall down again. It was a long wave, and it deposited him on the stairs. That was the way he wanted to go, down into the cellar. But that was where they all wanted to go, not only those on the ground floor but those from the first and second floors too. The stairs reached no farther than that. But now there was no staircase to be seen. It was a wild, hanging garland, a shrieking, roaring garland of jammed, motionless bodies. The garland was burning—a fiery ladder to heaven; smoke was pouring from outstretched arms, legs, hair. A limbless torso had as much chance of getting down as one with arms and legs. Men could drop, they had to drop, and they did drop; they bounced down the steep remains of the staircase, fell through the air, and crashed on top of the multitude like grains from a corn-elevator. Arms and legs were superfluous: men were corn falling on the heap, being sucked into the vortex. Alive or dead, they got somewhere.

Lawkow screamed, and then he screamed no more. He gurgled and coughed smoke through mouth and nose, while he rowed with his one arm and both legs. A wave of distorted faces, clutching hands, and red foaming mouths, threw him down on to the corridor, the long corridor with the strong current of air.

Again the hanging curtain of burning beams, this time from the other side. But anything was better than snorting, spitting, biting, gnashing teeth and clawing hands. Lawkow managed to tear himself away from the tumult and get through the burning wall. Behind it, he knew, was peace.

It was only a step, and there again were the stretchers and the faces that suffered no more. There was the huge open window by which he had entered. The sky beyond was red foam. Now, going back the way he had come, Lawkow saw that he had climbed in over a ramp of corpses.

He got outside and went back to the 2 cm. flak-gun. He meant to go on to the telephone he had used before, but

that was unnecessary: there was a wire in the heap of ruins in front of him. He stood there, the burning, crashing Town Command before his eyes, his mouth to the telephone, crying:

"General. . . . It's too late! I'm reporting what I see. The walls are as transparent as glass. The house is a burning oven from top to bottom. What's pouring out of the gaping sides like fishes are human beings. There are struggling men everywhere, in the rooms, on the stairs, on the collapsing floors. I've got them before my eyes, and I've got the marks of their teeth on my hand, the marks of their fingernails on my face. That's a hospital, under your command, General!"

The building of Town Command was on fire to its foundations. As flames broke out of all the windows, and crumbling walls plunged down through the floors and thundered on to the cellar, fighting troops on both flanks of the house withdrew to right and to left. The sides and rear of the house were still under fire; and the burning, smoking façade and part of the front wing towered on land that had become Russian again.

On this front side of the burning house cellar flaps opened and men poured out of holes, out of windows, through gaps in the wall. Among them was a chief staff-M.O. and a group of doctors with the surviving wounded and sick, and some that could not walk but were still able to stagger or slide along in the snow and so into captivity.

"I obey!"

These words had turned streets into channels of death, buildings into charnel-houses, and hospitals into battle-fields. They had turned the land between Volga and Don and southwards to Karpovka into a broad land of corpses; they had turned regiments and divisions into herds of hopeless beasts of burden.

*Now, for once, these fateful words were not uttered!*

In the hour when they no longer touched infantry or captains or commanders; in the hour when they reached the top of the pyramid, the head of the military hierarchy, and there became a personal demand—they were not uttered.

The words were not uttered.

There was a man with a worn, tired face; there was a hand, the tired, writing-table hand of a Prussian general-staff man. The hand held the field-marshal's baton, and

the baton was given to be clasped in a cold, dead hand. The dead Field-Marshal on the Volga: that was the demand. After six thousand million squandered reichsmarks and two hundred thousand wasted human lives it was not only the demand of an insane "Führer," it was the stern imperative of a caste that within the space of one generation had twice set out for conquest and twice been defeated. The dead Field-Marshal on the Volga, the zenith in the campaign of death, the crown on the pallid brow of the slain army, the torch set up on the snowfields, the pointer for a coming generation and for another campaign of conquest setting out for the Volga. That was the conception, that was the order, and that was the law which now in the brain and heart of the Field-Marshal was blood of his blood and flesh of his flesh.

The man was dead-tired and yet restless. At this hour the twitching of one-half of his face—from the ear to the temple and brow and down to the jaw—was but the last spasmodic jerk of a hand bound to the cross, not of a dead hand clutching a marshal's baton. That facial atrophy will remain the future symbol of that hour.

The fateful words which up to that hour had meant the death of two hundred thousand men were not uttered. There sat a man behind a curtain in the darkened annexe of a cellar. There had been a hand at his door, but the door had not opened. Now he should get up and go through the corridor to his Chief, and shout the unspoken words into his ear, and thus arrest the present course of events. His words should ring out from end to end of the cellar: "I obey! The battle position will be defended! To the last bullet! The order applies to this house too!"

The man from whom these words were to be expected as the last consistency stood up and groped through the half-dark corridor. He passed by the Chief's room and entered that of the divisional commander, Roske.

"How is the situation, Roske?"

"The situation is very serious. The Russians are everywhere. They're drawing closer all round."

The man returned to his hole, crouched for a while in the darkness, hands limp on his knees, then stretched himself out on his bunk. For the Field-Marshal it was infinitely harder than for the caliph in the fairy tale. He could not wander unrecognised through his realm in a mantle of poverty. He could not stroll in a soldier's

mantle through his domain of death, look into the eyes of the dying, see the foam on the lips, hear the last gurgling. He was chained to his Headquarters and must make do with abstractions. He was a man who loved to consult history, especially the history of war. When there was a battle to be planned the given examples were a "Hochkirch," a "Kunersdorf," a "Sedan"; and mistakes made here or there had to be included in his calculations and avoided. And at this crucial hour of his life he was not without a historical parallel. On November, 1918, at the end of a lost war, the High Command had withdrawn the general of infantry already appointed to lead the armistice commission and thus deprived the armistice commission of its military character; and a field-marshal had said: "Perhaps for the first time in the history of the world an armistice is negotiated not by soldiers but by politicians. But I am in favour, since the High Command is no longer capable of political guidance."

The man who had lost the war evaded the responsibility for the impending catastrophe. In November 1918, a Field-Marshal had done that at the end of a lost war. Ergo: in January 1943, at the end of a lost battle, a Field-Marshal says: "I will have nothing to do with it." And that very night his Chief will declare on his behalf that he demands to be regarded as a civilian. What was possible the first time, the second time is an already trodden path! But this reasoning failed to satisfy. The Field-Marshal lay in the darkness and his face twitched.

Meanwhile events took their course. The facts are simple and weigh as light as the sacrifices in idealism, in happiness, in sweat and blood and bones, weigh heavy. The persons concerned were the Chief of Staff, the Interpreter of the Army, and the newly-promoted General Roske.

The ruin of the department-store lay under artillery and mortar fire. The firing lasted for twenty minutes. The Chief had a conversation behind closed doors with the Interpreter and General Roske. Interpreter and general donned their fur coats and left the house. The Chief remained behind, towering like a tree, his shoulders even farther back and his eyes gleaming even brighter than usual. He issued orders, terse and unmistakable; and officers took the orders and passed them on.

"To 1a, 1b, 1c: burn all papers. To 2a, 2b: burn all

lists and books. To 3a: burn all documents. To 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d, 4e: burn, burn, burn."

The Army signals-commander received the order: "Destroy radio apparatus. Destroy codes."

It was plain enough, but the Army signals-commander failed to understand. He had expected something different. He had expected the order to fight, he had expected the confusion of hand-to-hand fighting in the cellar rooms, and finally the mine that would blow up the whole house with himself and his radio apparatus and destroy it sure enough. He left his cabin to confirm the correctness of the order. Outside he found orderly officers, supply officers, medical and veterinary officers, officials, clerks, all of whom had received the same order. Colonel Carras was there too, saying to all and sundry: "Never mind about your stuff—burn it, it's of no further value now." To the signals-commander he said: "It's quite right—smash up your shop."

The house was rumbling. Somewhere in the long dark corridors it sounded as though railway trains were being shunted. There was a smell of burning, and the white dust of plaster. The light failed in a number of rooms. Hindenburg lights flickered up, hopeless little glow-worms in a monstrous cave.

Colonel Carras took the signals-commander behind the curtain and showed him something. Between the Chief's room and that of the Commander-in-Chief was a staircase leading upwards, barricaded up to the ceiling with sand-bags. Now, to free the staircase, these sandbags, frozen together, were being prized apart by men with iron bars.

"The back stairs are being cleared for the guest," said Colonel Carras.

The signals-commander returned to his room and assembled his men round him. Before beginning the work of destruction, he radioed to the northern group and gave them the code: thus this separated group was now able to communicate direct with the army group outside and with Berlin. Then papers were burned, and apparatus and Bosch accumulator smashed. Again a number of lights failed and more Hindenburg lights appeared. The shunting at the end of the cellar, the crash of splinters, the loud detonations above the cellar ceilings all ceased.

The bombardment had stopped.

Now there was something else. When the signals-commander stepped out into the darkness, dimly lit by Hindenburg lights, he sensed it. As he saw the seemingly petrified, apathetic figures powdered with plaster dust—it became certainty. He ran past the curtain and through the gangway, which was full of staff people with red stripes and decorated with gold, silver, red, blue and green like an oriental bazaar, and as he managed to cast a glance into the room of the Commander-in-Chief—there it was!

The guest had arrived.

This is what had happened. The Field-Marshal had not uttered his words. He had slept, or at least retired to sleep. The Chief had acted, not as Chief of the Army, for as such he would have had to notify his changed dispositions to those parts of the army still within reach; he had acted like any occupier of any private house threatened with destruction. His two emissaries were the Interpreter and the master of the department-store ruin, General Roske. The Chief had done something else too. He had summoned Colonel Ludwig, artillery-commander in a neighbouring ruin, who, as the Chief had been informed, had already begun talks with Russian negotiators.

Colonel Ludwig begged the orderly officer who brought the summons to allow him to eat his supper first; and as things were he wondered whether he was eating the last meal of the condemned. It was all the more surprising to find the Chief unusually polite and only requiring confirmation that he had in fact been negotiating with the Russians

"Oh, so you *are* negotiating with them? But what about us, the 'Army'?"

"Herr General can have a Russian emissary too."

"Will you see to that then, please, Ludwig?"

Colonel Ludwig was instructed by the Chief to begin negotiations for surrender on behalf of Army Headquarters and to send Russian representatives to H.Q. as well. Thus the Chief of the General Staff of the Army made the matter doubly sure.

General Roske and the Interpreter left the house. They ran across the yard, along the drive, and here Roske stopped under a projecting portion of the house. The square was in darkness; the searchlights had been extinguished. Above hummed a transport plane, circling

and evidently at a loss to know where to drop its load. Artillery was hacking at the façade of the house. The Interpreter, a Balt by birth, ran on. In front of a neighbouring ruin he met Colonel Ludwig, whose negotiations with the Russians were so far advanced that firing had ceased on the sector indicated by him. At that moment the firing in the direction of the Theatre Cellar stopped, only to turn on to the department-store ruin.

Colonel Ludwig was seeking wireless communication with the Russians in order to get a representative for Army H.Q. as well. The Interpreter was in a hurry and ran on. He reached a railway bridge. There stood a Russian tank. The turret of the tank was open, and in it stood a lieutenant.

The Interpreter called to the Russian lieutenant. The lieutenant beckoned him on. Now he had a German officer before him who spoke Russian and who said to him: "Herr Leutnant, cease fire! I've got something wonderful for you—promotion, and all the decorations you can think of! You can come with me and take prisoner the Field-Marshal and the entire Staff of the German Army!"

"*Shto takoi?* What's that?" Promotion, decorations, Field-Marshal—it sounded a lot. The lieutenant got the Interpreter to repeat it. Then he vanished into his tank, radioed to the rear, bobbed up again. The Interpreter was a little disappointed; he found the behaviour of the lieutenant rather too calm and unexcited.

The lieutenant said: "*Ladno!*" That meant "O.K.!"

Two more Russian officers and some men with machine-pistols came along. Guided by the Interpreter, the party moved towards the square. Without leaving his cover General Roske raised both hands to his mouth and called something to the party in broken Russian. The Russians did not understand it. As they arrived at the entrance the general told them, again in faulty Russian, that the Great Chief of the Germans wished to negotiate with the Great Chief of the Russians.

The Great Chief of the besieging unit, the twenty-one-year-old Ukranian tank-lieutenant Feodor Yevchenko, said: "*Ladno!*" General Roske and the Interpreter led the party across the yard, not down the sloping ramp but through a mine-free side entrance direct into the part of the cellar behind the curtain.

The signals-commander and the others that came out of their holes suddenly saw sitting at the round table of the Commander-in-Chief the tall, wind-tanned adjutant of the Commander-in-Chief, General Roske, the Interpreter, a Russian tank-lieutenant, two other Russian officers, and men with machine-pistols standing round them.

The Chief of the Army raised the curtain of the Field-Marshal's room, which was only lit by the dim lamp of a radio receiver, stood to attention, and said: "I have to report that the Russians are here." He did not wait for an answer but let the curtain fall.

Negotiations were carried on at the round table, though there was not much to negotiate. The tank-lieutenant declared that German soldiers and officers who surrendered would be treated as stated in the ultimatum of Generals Voronov and Rokossovski. Outside in the corridor, in the long gangway, with groups of officers standing around with red stripes on their trousers, with silver shoulder-pieces and collar-badges, in white camouflage mantles, the surrender was already well under way. The officers were throwing their revolvers on an ever-growing heap.

General Roske, the adjutant and the Interpreter stood up and, with the Russian tank-lieutenant, entered the little side-room. The Russian looked around him. It was narrow here; the night-watchman of the shop might have lived there once. A bed had been placed in a corner, and on it lay the Field-Marshal. He half raised himself. On his tunic he wore the little metal clip and the decorations of the First and Second World Wars.

The Field-Marshal laid his revolver on the table, together with a short dagger. The Russian took the revolver; indicating the dagger he said: "*Nie nuzhno.*" The dagger was not required and the Field-Marshal could have it back.

The officers returned to the large room and seated themselves again. The Chief declared and the Interpreter translated that the Field-Marshal demanded to be regarded as a civilian and imposed the condition that he must not be conducted through the town on foot but driven away in a closed car. This demand was also repeated to a Russian colonel who had just entered.

. . .

Events were taking their course.

The last survivors were crawling and stumbling out of

the smouldering ruins of Town Command, and from other ruins in the vicinity came soldiers of the fighting troops; large groups, small groups, with blackened faces and glowing eyes. They showed the white flag and collected round the great throng of sick and wounded standing in the middle of the square.

Half a kilometre away, on the station square, there was shooting. Russians were shooting and Germans were shooting, with rifles, machine-guns, machine-pistols. Right across the square, from house-front to house-front, bullets hummed like swarms of crazy, glowing insects. Tanks rolled up in single file; the turrets opened, and suddenly the firing ceased and silence rose up to the milky sky. And from the black window-holes, whence a moment before there had been shooting, white cloths appeared first in one place, then in another, then in a third. After the first man and the first group had ventured on to the square the movement went on. From other directions, too, grey tongues of soldier-folk licked up to the square, hands raised, fur caps or pointed forage-caps pulled down over ears. Before long a crowd of seven hundred German prisoners-of-war stood on the station square.

Major Buchner awoke from a rumbling night. The features of his adjutant, Lieutenant Loose, took shape before his eyes. But it was not Loose, it was Sergeant Januschek.

Januschek said: "Herr Major, we've got to get out of here. The place is falling on top of our heads."

The others, too, were there, the whole crowd of them. Major Buchner staggered up, out into the yard. The mill was on fire. The store was in flames Wheat was flying up in the air like a rain of stars, hundredweights of it. One kilo of flour he had received for twenty-seven men, and he'd had to give his last cigarettes for it—and now there was a huge firework of wheat going up in the air, while black flakes flew round his ears!

The yard was dark with humanity, but nobody cared to venture into the street. Everybody was crowding in front. From the back came shouts. "What's going on? You can see in front. Are the Russians killing the prisoners?"

"No, nothing's happening to them, they're only collecting them."

"Aren't they killing the officers either?"

"No, nothing's happening to them."

At this a crowd of soldiers ran out of the steam-mill—which was already falling to pieces—and surged into the street. Once again four or five hundred German prisoners-of-war paraded in front of a pile of ruins.

Through the cellars and ground-floor of the great prison-ruin rang cries of: "All outside, the Russians are here!"

And the Russians were there, in the middle of the courtyard. The doors opened and from the ground-floor, and out of the cellars, came a flood of officers and soldiers.

A lieutenant raved: "I'll shoot down any man who goes over!"

A colonel roared: "The defence goes on!"

But the crowd moved on, a thousand, two thousand men. The lieutenant and the colonel were mere specks in the slowly advancing mass.

Suddenly there was the hammering of a 2 cm. flak-gun. The gun stood behind a wall of earth. Men standing near cried: "It's the chief of the panzer-corps!"

The commander of the panzer-corps and some younger officers were standing with distorted faces behind the gun and firing out what they could. Russian mortar-batteries now began sending bombs into the courtyard. There were killed and wounded, both Germans and Russians, in the courtyard

"Murdering us, the swine! Shoot them down!" shouted some. But the mass stood there, their weapons thrown away, too apathetic to undertake anything. Let themselves be mown down at the last moment? No fear! Let the Russians do it! And the flak went on hammering, the Russians went on firing. A wild shriek rose from two or three thousand throats. It was several minutes before the flak-gun could be silenced. It was twenty minutes before a telephone wire could be brought up and the Russian commander could order the "cease fire" again. Five thousand officers and men, among them colonels and several generals, surrendered here.

It was one hour before daybreak. From the airfield, from the Tartar Wall, Russian tanks rolled towards the town boundary. On one side the soldiers had the right "hunch." They laid their weapons on the edge of the trench, stood up with hands held high, and without firing a shot let the tanks roll by to the staff quarters. On the other side a heavy machine-gun began to rattle again, and hands were again raised with cartridge-clips. The tanks

swerved through the trench and crushed the men, and any that remained crouching in holes were killed by infantrymen who sprang out of the tanks.

There was sudden shooting at yet another place, where there were a number of dugouts with an earth bunker in the centre. A battalion-commander was crouching with his adjutant; for hours he had been trying to dissuade the adjutant from committing suicide. Suddenly there was a flash outside, the door flew open and a sergeant fell bleeding into the bunker.

"The Russians are here!" he cried.

"Out with the white flag!" shouted the commander.

At the same moment a shot rang out and the adjutant collapsed with a bullet in his temple. It was all so sudden —the sergeant falling into the bunker and now gasping his last on the ground, beside him the tall lieutenant with a bullet in his temple. The commander, too, reached for his revolver without realising that he was doing so. A hand gripped him and a voice yelled, "Herr Hauptmann, you mustn't!" The hand, the yell, and the panic-distorted face of the lance-corporal brought him to himself. With the lance-corporal he waited till the Russians came down into his bunker.

At another place General Vennekohl, abandoned by his men in a territory overrun by Russians, without even a sentry in front of his hole, was sitting in his bunker. For hours he had weighed the problem: Get captured—shoot myself? Suddenly he heard cautious footsteps descending the mud steps. He saw a figure in a padded jacket, followed by another. Two broad Russian faces appeared in the bunker.

"At last, thank goodness!" groaned Vennekohl. But the Russians stared in bewilderment at the German general. Evidently they had expected to find the bunker empty.

"*Russki soldat?*" asked Vennekohl.

"*Niet soldat,*" was the reply.

They were two Russian civilians who had escaped from a German unit and had not the slightest intention of taking prisoner a German general. So Vennekohl was plunged back into his agonising problem—which was no longer a problem, for to be captured he need only wait, whereas to shoot himself required resolution, and that was what General Vennekohl was unable to summon.

Thus the surrender began, without a common decision

or a common organisation. Where organisation or the initiative of group commanders had been in evidence, as for example in the prison courtyard, they had been frustrated by the High Command, and the consequence was a bloody massacre at the eleventh hour. With some surrendering, some resisting, sometimes in the same sector or even in the same bunker, everything was in confusion. And the men who in the course of that night raised their hands high and assembled in grey hordes were but the first heavy raindrop of what was to become a deluge and a flood drifting into captivity.

The sky became grey, and an icy white mist drifted over the earth. There was a field of rubble, which with the heap of ruins at the edge looked like a broad, round stage. Five white-painted tanks rolled up and stood like torpedo-boats in a white flood. A short-legged man with a heavy head on a short-stocky body suddenly found himself facing this silent semicircle. The night before he had been on the telephone to his commanding general, and had agreed to defend the battle-position. Now he had just left his commander's bunker, having confirmed the promise with a handshake. He carried a rifle on his shoulder, and his belt-pouches were full of cartridges. The five white-painted tanks stood there with their silent gun-barrels raised, and before the entrance to his bunker stood a squad of Red Army men. It was a similar, or identical, position to that in which the army had now been for many days.

Telephone-talk, personal talk, handshakes, then rifle against cheek and bang-bang! at the Red Army men, at the tanks! Shoot? Of course he could shoot—and get killed! But that would be raving lunacy, not the sensible act of a commander of an infantry division, of a lecturer and adviser in the war-history department of the War Office! And then came this argument and sudden self-realisation: after all, he was not young enough for such crazy antics, he was far too old and sluggish for that!

General Gönnern left his rifle-sling untouched. With desperate resolution on his face, and a rather mechanical gait, he covered the twelve paces to his bunker-entrance. The Russians grinned and let him pass. The general went inside. He undid his top collar-button, pressed his hand hard against his neck, and drew a deep breath. Down there they were all on their feet. In the centre were two white-haired men, the commanding general from the south

and the one from Gumrak. Gönnern did not say: "Gentlemen"; he did not use the plural at all. He might have been speaking to one or the other or even speaking to himself.

"Well, Herr General," he said, "the Russians are outside."

They knew it already, and he could see it in their eyes that their decision had been made in advance. A minute of silence passed, then Gönnern turned round. He went back up the steps and reached the top. He looked at the Russians, recognised an officer, and said: "Herr Offizier, there are three generals in here who wish to surrender."

At the same hour, five hundred metres away, in the ruins of the flying-school, sat General Geest, surrounded by a number of men still shooting from the snow-holes all round. General Geest, his yellow, bony face under a steel helmet, crouched there with his chin on his fists, staring at the bare table-top. Suddenly the light from outside was blocked by a figure coming through the doorway. It was his adjutant, Major von Bauske.

"Herr General, the time has come. I would suggest doing it now," said Bauske.

"Oh, don't start that again, Bauske! You know the Commander-in-Chief's order; he's forbidden it."

"I'm going to do it, Herr General."

"I'm not, and if you must do it, don't do it here in the bunker, please!"

Some minutes later, in the milky world outside, Geest again caught sight of his adjutant a few metres away. In Bauske's outstretched hand was a hand-grenade with the pin not yet pulled out. Geest turned abruptly away, returned to his bunker and sat there as before, his head supported on his hands. Once again a shadow fell across his table, and the man standing beside him was again Bauske. He had not done it.

Geest stood up and became emotional. It was the hour for it; the air was charged with emotion and there was something solemn about the grey morning. He gripped Baron von Bauske's hand and said: "This is the greatest victory you have ever won, victory over yourself! And for that——" He bent over the table-drawer, pulled it open, took out an Iron Cross, Class I (in special cases a divisional commander can award it to members of his staff), and pinned it on his adjutant's tunic.

"For that, Bauske!"

A few minutes later—for the men in the snow-holes were still shooting and drawing Russian fire—General Geest saw his adjutant Bauske lying in the snow, shot through the head.

Another few minutes, and Geest saw his neighbour General Vennekohl pass by, escorted by a troop of Russian soldiers. Geest called to the Russians and, with the rest of his staff and his sixty men, surrendered.

Vennekohl, Geest, Gönnern, and the two commanding generals all surrendered here on the town boundary. They were taken through the town of ruins to the bank of the Volga and into the bunkers and battle-positions of the Russian army-staff. In their wake the captured generals brought hordes of German soldiers who had also surrendered. Ruins, out of which a moment before rifle-fire still flashed, fell silent, and the next minute earthy figures with hands raised high came out of holes and from behind heaps of rubble.

A short distance from the Gönnern battle-position was a balka from which a path led to a square surrounded by broken house-fronts. On the square stood a high Russian commander and odd groups of surrendered German soldiers; and from a hundred holes in the house-fronts showed the faces of soldiers who had not yet surrendered. A German general came up the path from the balka, a grey-head in mantle and peaked cap, on his lapel in silver a dangling Knight's Cross. He stepped up to the Russian commander and held out his hand. The Russian shook his hand and patted him on the shoulder. The men stood around in astonishment; the men in the hundred holes were amazed. From the ruins there were cries of: "Well, if it's like that here. . . ." And soon the remnants of battalions poured out of holes all around, rucksacks in hands or on shoulders, blankets over arms, ready to march off and awaiting the order from the Russian side.

Day had dawned with icy mists from the Volga sweeping through tall skeletons of stone and mile-long windowless streets. Up to now it had been a vainglorious enterprise, a labour of Hercules, an expedition on wheels with fireworks and whips and human sacrifice, a bloody procession through countries, a lunatic ship sailing into the unknown under a crazy captain. Only on the last stretch, just before the finish, did it become apparent that oneself was the

fatted calf to be adorned with gilded horns and gay ribbons and led to the slaughter. Only now did things assume a serious aspect and the great conversion begin. "Dust thou art and to dust shalt thou return."

On that day the great migration began. Cellars opened up. Along the Volga, for seven or eight kilometres from the railway-fork known as the "tennis racket" as far as the Tsaritsa, the northern part of which was still unaffected by the movement, and for three kilometres from the Volga to the town boundary, men oozed out into the fog, in hooded mantles, in field blouses, in greatcoats, in tatters, with feet in rags, lousy, scabby, starved, covered with wounds and ulcers, some with blankets and bundles in their hands, some empty-handed, grey face after grey face thronging the streets.

A "T 34" lumbering up the ravine from the Volga squashed its way over corpses lying fathom high. Those standing near were too weary to lift their hands and wipe the splashes from their faces. From a field-kitchen set up on the way one man wolfed ten helpings and lay down and died on the march, yet none of the shuffling procession looked round either at him or at them.

The roof of a sunken shed was covered with starving creatures, eyes gleaming, all working with sweat dripping from foreheads and noses. They were throwing corpse after corpse, and half-dead men too, over the side and down into the snow. Failing to find the food supposed to be stored there, they worked more and more furiously. Without doubt they were insane, as was the soldier who suddenly bobbed up and roared in a commanding voice: "Make way, everybody! I'm general of artillery Heitz and must go into my bunker here!" The men standing near showed no interest; they did not even turn round.

From the Heroes' Square moved a procession of a hundred or more men in thick greatcoats with fur collars, large fur caps, fur-lined camouflage mantles and warm boots, their faces marked by strained nerves but by no sort of physical hardship. Behind them came men carrying kitbags, knapsacks, suitcases. On both sides of this procession stood long lines of soldiers with smeared faces, arms hanging heavy as lead, and eyes that gave no indication of what the soldiers were thinking or whether they were thinking at all.

Out of cellars, out of rubble, out of holes in the ground,

down from heaps of débris and up from balkas came ever more faces. The mass that assembled in grey heaps and spread itself in an endless line waiting for the order to move off had no need to strew ashes on its head. These soldiers were "finished," in their legs, in their brains, their entrails, their hearts; they were without past and without future, for the move to the Volga could be neither future nor foundation for any future. They were finished, burnt out, ashes.

This street of hopelessness opened a passage-way. A car hooted, and the figures with tattered blankets, with empty hands, with nothing to eat on the road, stepped aside. The car came from the same direction as the procession of staff-officers, from the Heroes' Square.

It was a closed car, but the windows were without curtains, and the faces outside rushed by like smoke, a line of smoke on one side and a line of smoke on the other side. Even the field-kitchen set up on the street corner, which seemed to float on a surface of faces, turned heads and outstretched arms, was but a fleeting picture in the grey sea of humanity. The "T 34" rising out of a balka and out of the fog, and covered with splashes to its turret-top, was another fleeting picture. A shed, a little way back from the roadway, with a rather odd-looking, frenzied gathering on its roof, was a third lingering picture. In the front of the car sat two Red Army men; inside sat a Russian commander, and beside him a tall man whose face was like a face on a cameo. At this moment the left half of the face, usually like a maggoty patch on a fine and well-shaped apple, was at rest, so heavy a load had fallen from this man and so free from burden he felt as he drove rapidly by.

The faces of the soldiers rushed past—soldiers left without a last army order, without a word of farewell or of thanks. This beaten horde was no topic for conversation. As for the party on the shed roof—the man in the closed car knew about dysentery and typhus and hunger paralysis, for these had been placed before him in figures. But that the refuse pails of the operating rooms had been robbed and the refuse ditches of the surgeons opened and emptied and their contents eaten—for that there had been no heading in the situation reports. So he little knew that his army had reached a condition in which a single word—especially if it suggested hidden

food—could awaken wild fancies and drive hundreds into insane activity. He was thus at a loss to understand the strange and eager exertions of the men on the shed roof. That dead men were being rolled down he certainly saw; but that there were wounded men among the stiff bundles plunging down like marionettes was quite beyond his power of imagination. In any case this screaming, gesticulating and altogether odd roof-party offered no subject-matter for a conversation between the captured German Field-Marshal and the escorting high Russian officer. There was the "T 34"—no doubt this Russian tank, like the Russian machine-pistol, the German "Messerschmitt" and the Czech Bren-gun, would one day emerge from this war as the highest and most permanent creation of its kind; but this too was hardly a suitable topic and would inevitably steer the conversation into matters military, which must be avoided.

But there was a topic! A Red Army man was rolling a cigarette of *makhorka*, the Russian soldiers' tobacco, for a German "Landser."*

"That's always interested me, Herr Polkovnik," said the Field-Marshal. "The Russian soldiers' tobacco, this so-called *makhorka*. Does this tobacco contain nicotine just like ordinary tobacco?"

"Our soldiers certainly prefer it, Herr Feldmarschall, and they won't exchange it for the ordinary tobacco. As far as I know it does contain nicotine."

"Yes, I suppose it must, for where else would that pleasant stimulation and the feeling of general well-being come from, which *makhorka* evidently produces? By the way, what does the plant look like, Herr Polkovnik?"

A fruitful topic, and one that could be spun out a long way.

Outside the window were soldiers, ever more hordes of soldiers with tattered uniforms, burnt-out faces, limping on sticks, with feet wrapped in sacking; in front lay the way through the snow. No quartermaster or quartermaster's squad had prepared even the scantiest straw bedding for the soldiers. Nobody had thought of it. In Army H.Q. only the rear party with the field gendarmes and court-martial officers had functioned up to the last minute. And the Field-Marshal drove by, chatting about a weed with peculiar curling leaves.

* Soldier. The expression "Landser" corresponds to the English "Tommy."

Not the "Führer," for he was far away, had the grey hordes of soldiers before his eyes, soldiers more beaten and wretched than the beaten and wretched grenadiers of Kolin and Kunersdorf. Not the "Führer," for he was the man at the end of the long lever and an upstart at that. It was the Commander-in-Chief of the army, which since its encirclement and splitting-up had been left to its own resources like a lone ship, who carried out the order that encompassed its downfall. It was not so much the Chief of Staff, for that unwieldy figure was easy enough to explain: as a Nazi in the framework of the great Prussian General Staff he was no more than an episodic figure, to some extent an experimental form which after a bare ten years had proved incapable of survival. Not the wild Nazi general, but the tall man with the face cut like a cameo, who embodied a personal road through two wars and a tradition going back to Kolin and Kunersdorf, to Rossbach and Leuthen, and who already saw a Third World War looming up, was the surety for the consequences in insanity too. It was he who first impressed on the sentence of death the far-fetched seal of history.

The conception of world mastery arose from small beginnings—from the circumstances of a small Central European State, from the sweat of the oppressed and the atmosphere of the barracks. Set up for the first time as a challenge to the world, it had failed; set up for the second time, enormously inflated and backed by all the attributes of an unscrupulous contempt for humanity, it was again meeting disaster and in one long leap collapsing. And on one great battlefield, in a continent-wide theatre of war, lay the shattered bones of two hundred thousand men. A country mourns—and there stands an impoverished nation, workers powerless, farmers without rights on their own soil, citizens helpless on the ruins of their bombed possessions.

And there on the great field of rubble on the Volga bloomed a semi-atrophy on the countenance of a Field-Marshal. That was in the previous night, and it was a sign of great agitation, the expression of a dilemma. Deep inside was the death-order; outside there was his own skin. And therein lay logic, a ray of light breaking through the thick clouds of two centuries: a sacrifice is justified only if it is for one's own soil and for the preservation and safety of one's own people! To press the crown of sacrifice

for high ideals on a wrecked expedition of robbery was impossible, absurd, grotesque! That was the ray of light. It shone over the field of two hundred thousand corpses and guided the Field-Marshal across the dark bridge. If the *hemi-atrophia facialis* could not ennoble the sacrifice, at least it put the seal on a two-hundred-years-old error.

That was at the beginning of that night.

Now the private citizen with the finely-chiselled features sat in a closed car talking about the Russian soldiers' tobacco.

"So the blossoms of this plant are white and red, and more rarely yellow? *Ach*, now I understand, Herr Polkovnik! It's the common loosestrife of the genus *lythraceæ*. It grows in Germany too; there are more than twenty varieties. Very interesting indeed. . . ."

The Field-Marshal discussed *makhorka*.

Outside the window were soldiers—the threshed grains of a threshed army, empty husks that had once been full, living corn. And like wind through a pile of husks, a movement began—shuffling of invisible feet, a trickle forward, slow, unendingly slow, away from the Volga, towards the west.

No hand raised. No "Vivat Marschall!" No "Heil!"

Only once they lifted their faces. Under the smoke-blackened gate of a ruin stood a crowd of Russians. They were different from those described at the echelons as "co-operative." They were different from the prisoners-of-war who in squads of half a hundred, ragged, starving and bent almost to the ground, had had to heave marooned lorries through swamp and snow, build roads and pull sledges. This was a troop of Russian soldiers of the 62nd Siberian Army, who had defended Stalingrad from the narrow territory along the river bank with their general's bunker only three hundred metres from the German positions. They stood there smoking rolled cigarettes with mud and grime on their lamb's-wool coats and padded trousers. They had lain in the same muck, under artillery fire, under waves of tanks and the bombs of Stukas. And they had stood it—three months here, on their way from the Don a whole summer and half a winter. There they were smoking *makhorka*, broad Russian heads, serene faces, calm eyes looking on. The faces of those shuffling by rose and sank again.

The great trek began, past smoke-blackened walls, tall

house-skeletons, huge mounds of scrap-iron and cement, through streets that were nothing but quarries. Then down into a balka, where steel helmets, broken guns and shattered motors lay in the snow, and the walls were lined with hole after hole and cave after cave. A Russian woman with two children looking for somewhere to live had no eyes for the endless stream of humanity shuffling by. There were still rifle shots, sometimes near, sometimes far away. The balka ran as far as the town boundary and then the way led up again. On the right were ruins, and behind them was Hill 102. In a field were the hacked stumps of trees standing out of the snow, and beyond them a railway-track. Across the railway—and then began the endless wandering through the snow. Over the airfield they went, past the Tartar Wall and along the road to Gumrak. To Gumrak was eighteen kilometres, and it took two days.

At dawn a mist rose over the frozen Volga, piled up against the steep embankment crept on through house-gates and window-holes and labyrinths of stone, drowned all holes beneath itself and drifted on in icy lanes. Another lane—darker in its mass, pressed flatter on the snow, slower than the drifting fog and penetrating farther—was the procession of prisoners.

At noon the sun stood like a white wheel in the sky, and a myriad crystals danced in the air. The snow surface was so dazzling that black threads and patches showed before the eyes, and the dim brown shapes seemed more unreal than the haze.

One had to turn the head half-right and look away across the snow-surface towards Stalingrad-North. Over there was the cut-off northern group, who had no idea, or only an incomplete idea, of the events in the centre of the town and in the southern ring. Their commander had once more thrown them in against the wedging Hill 102, into the factory quarter at the town boundary, into the ruins of the "Red October Works," the tractor works, the workers' colony. All unsuspecting, they had drawn on themselves the now freed and concentrated mass of the Russian artillery. Rising clouds of smoke could be seen across the white, sparkling snow-surface. Iron archways that up to now had stood were beginning to collapse. Barricades of benches, steam boilers, switchboards, a hundred times ploughed over, again flew into the air. The

hill Mamayev Kurgan, the scene of weeks-long terrible fighting, changed shape in fire and smoke. An explosion —iron, pieces of tanks, burning oil. A spiral of smoke wildly rotating in a crystal sky, turning, reaching the zenith and the white sun; and showers of black flakes chasing over the snow-covered land.

The procession moved along the road to Gumrak, dipped into a ravine, went up the other side and spanned itself onwards, a long grey thread, ten, twenty, thirty thousand men, half an army, or what was left of it, while the other half was again in action, being hacked, buried under iron débris, in hecatombs blown into the air. Still not enough! Its German mother had borne it for a last flicker under the bright winter sky. While iron and flame and dust still swept through the windowless halls, its commander, who had received from the southern group the code and also the text of the Reichsmarschall's speech, radioed in high indignation to the Führer's Headquarters: " Untimely funeral orations forbidden! "

An hour later he sent the officially required message announcing a fight to the last man. But since the High Command of the 6th Army had sunk into silence without " signing off " or sounding its last note, this formula—coined out of the final spasm of the Army—was nothing but a rhetorical flourish. A number of unit-commanders found themselves unable to accept the summons to a final entry into action. Elderly colonels pointed out the lunacy of sending the men into action again; and one of these grey-heads flung himself on his knees and implored his commander to put an end to the needless slaughter. Finally the troops lying apart from the battle area in the factory territory refused to let themselves be dragged into the vortex. At the " tennis racket," by the Ovrashnaya, and at the bakery, soldiers laid down their weapons and let the Russian tanks through to the rear, right to the doors of the staffs. The confusion was so great that, while the commander was with his staff, his armoured car, parked in front of his bunker, was stolen and he had to continue his way on foot. The collapse was not long in coming, and another twenty thousand officers and men, among them the commander of the northern group with his Chief-of-Staff and seven generals, went into captivity. Thus in the evening and on the following morning the stream of prisoners moving to the west received a new tributary.

There were now forty-five thousand men moving along in groups that stretched out, broke in two, strove to join up again and bunched together; slithering, staggering, with bandaged heads, here a man with broken ribs, there one with a shattered arm-bone, some legless, lying on their stomachs on sledges and punting themselves forward with sticks in their hands; all with empty bellies devoid of any reserve of fat, with frozen snow clinging to their rag-wrapped feet, every step an exertion, and at a speed of one kilometre per hour. Forty-five thousand men—and the last crust of bread eaten, the last field-dressing used, the last litre of fuel gone and the remaining stocks blown up. No means of transport—armoured cars, lorries, ambulances, trucks, tractors driven to death or blown up. For its men the 6th Army had had only the grave in view and had planned accordingly. These were the hordes handed over to death. And not only grimy faces, hanging arms, filthy greatcoats, but dysentery, typhus, pestilence went with them. To set this horde of death on the march to the west, to open the German front and lead them back to those who had put them into such a state—any such idea had to be abandoned. Not one man, except the officers and staffs, would have survived the four hundred kilometres and reached the German lines alive.

Russia had to take over this chaotic procession of forty-five thousand men. With the German soldiers captured in the preceding days the total was now ninety-one thousand—a gigantic multitude that must be tended, fed, transported. Their own pockets empty. The steppe villages razed to the ground. All cattle on the farms slaughtered. Railway-tracks rendered unusable. Rail transport was possible only beyond the old Russian front line. The procession of prisoners was moving in the direction of Kotluban. The journey there must be covered on foot, and Gumrak was to be the first halting-place on the march. For this improvised collecting-point the Russian front-line troops had allocated a proportion of their doctors, medical orderlies and ambulance equipment. But the mass of prisoners moved at the rate of one kilometre an hour, and for a journey which normally took five hours they needed two days.

In the evening the icy mist was there again. It came not only from the Volga; it rose out of all the ravines and was the breath of the snow-covered land. At the Balka

Krutaya, which was not very deep but split up into wild side gullies, a wooden bridge led across, its planks removed and the gaps stopped up with horse-bones and frozen snow. Over this bridge moved the feeble creatures mummified in mantles and rags; first a batch, then a group, then two men supporting each other with heads hanging, then one pulling another on a sledge, again a closed column, and ever more men shuffling, staggering, slipping, falling and rising again, to all appearances like drifting smoke.

This movement had begun when the sun was already high; before, there had been nothing but a white waste. While the snow-field was still empty and the morning mist was drifting over the bridge one man had arrived here: a general in a long driver's coat. Half-way across the bridge he had halted and looked down. He saw a dead horse and the red glow of a dying fire, and crouching round the fire four figures huddled in greatcoats and canvas. They were still crouching there when the procession came along and began to cross the bridge. But now there were five. The man in the driver's coat had called down to the four: "Hey, you, what are you squatting down there for? What are you waiting for?"

"For the end," was the answer.

He seemed to know the voice. He went down. The man who had answered was Sergeant Gnotke. Sergeant Gnotke shook the snow off himself, stood up and said: "Herr Oberst" (and colonel or general, that no longer mattered), "there's no point in it all now. Once I thought one must live in all circumstances, and that used to help me. But now I don't know so much, and it's terrible."

"A terrible situation," Vilshofen answered; and he looked at the others.

"That's Private Altenhuden—he can't get up any more," Gnotke explained. "And that's Private Franz Schiele, he can't get up either." One glance at them was enough. Vilshofen recognised Altenhuden; he looked the same as ever; his face was peaceful and of a delicate blue tint. Franz Schiele, whom Vilshofen did not know, had the same calm, bluish face. "And that's Matthias Gimpf. He's asleep now. When he wakes up he talks about a great march of prisoners."

"Well, let's sit down!"

Vilshofen and Gnotke seated themselves.

"A terrible situation; one can't get out of it by oneself." Thus Vilshofen took up the thread. Not by oneself. Not one step alone. One did not enter into life alone; and if one died alone one remained a carcase under the open sky.

"It's no good being alone, Gnotke."

"No, it's no good being alone." No one knew that better than Gnotke. There crouched Gimpf, up to the shoulders in snow, with burning brow and dried lips. He had long been a witness to Gnotke's fear of loneliness.

"But we weren't alone," said Gnotke; and the reproach in his words was not lost on Vilshofen. "No, we weren't alone. We knew the other fellow was beside us, and that behind us. . . ." And there the tangle began. In front the man with the rifle; in the rear the commander, the staff, the supply service. Still farther back the division, the corps, Army H.Q., the OKH, the OKW, the Führer and supreme commander; from top to bottom one stream, one will, one destiny. This towering pyramid was the expression of the national will, worker of the national will, guardian of the national destiny.

It all seemed so clear, clear as crystal. . . .

The Wehrmacht raising itself up to the glittering summit on millions of nailed grenadier boots, from base to apex the crystal-clear expression of the national soul—thus he took up the thread of his thoughts. Everything clear, crystal-clear . . . except that he was sitting in a Balka Krutaya; that opposite him crouched a man with hands tucked away in wide coatsleeves, a man ready to go under at any moment with folded arms, without making any effort to swim; another already sinking down into a great void; two blue stones already at the bottom of the deep sea; and above them the bridge, and drifting across it in scores were grey, endless crowds of living beings, eyeless larvæ or with eyes on the ground—a thousand feet, but feet no longer in grenadier boots, an endless slimy spoor; and except that suddenly a cannonade thundered to the sky, black clouds rolled up from Stalingrad-North, thick black flakes descended, and another thousand . . . three, four thousand men were falling. This was not the national will, this needless cannonade, the creatures creeping across the bridge, the men turned into blue corpse-stones. . . .

It was no longer crystal-clear; everything was blurred.

Overcome with exhaustion, Vilshofen dozed. But the thought span on, the sky rumbled on, the procession over

the bridge went on; and near him there was something going on—a fevered man speaking and Gnotke tending him.

The shuffling on the bridge and what was here under the bridge had nothing to do with a soul: at the most it concerned the W.-Prop. (Wehrmacht Propaganda Department). Divisions, corps, armies, the OKH, the OKW, the Führer—this gigantic pyramid was not the expression of the nation. Poor German nation, you have built cities, you have built cathedrals; you have placed a free peasant on free soil; in art, science, law, literature you have attained the heights. You founded the Hansa, the guilds, the freedom of the worker, you have found manifold means of self-expression; and your military organisation is but one feature of your face, one branch of your whole social constitution. This branch has become inflated, over-powerful, drawn everything to itself. It has torn down all the dams and flooded over the frontiers of the land. The farmer has had to leave his farm, the worker his work, the priest his parish, the teacher his students, youth its youth, the husband his wife; the people have ceased to be people and are nothing but fuel for the monstrous smoking volcano. And the individual is nothing but wood, peat, combustible fat, and finally a spat-out black flake.

Such were the thoughts of the half-sleeping man, the man who had gone into the First World War as a student of philosophy and come out of it an officer; who under the chief of the High Command had belonged to the Foreign Defence Department, and who in the year 1939 had set out to make the impossible possible.

One other in the balka was half sleeping—Matthias Gimpf. He murmured, gesticulated, looked up dreamily and recognised his comrade Gnotke, then lost himself again in an empty night of snow. Gimpf's nostrils and lips were black with dried mucus from the panting breath. His face was flushed but free of the blotches that covered the bared neck and chest. Gnotke was putting snow into Gimpf's mouth, and because he complained of a severe headache he held his snow-cooled hand on Gimpf's forehead.

At last Gimpf's mouth had opened and for Gnotke he was no longer a mystery. In delirium, as well as in spells of consciousness, he had poured it all out. Now Gnotke

knew where Gimpf had lost his face—in a moonless night of snow on the road from Vyasma to Smolensk.

Gnotke heard, and the now wide-awake Vilshofen heard too; but for Gnotke it was not the first time he had heard about that procession of horror that in a November night thirteen months ago had moved along the road from Vyasma to Smolensk.

". . . two little ones, like frisky puppies with fur caps and tiny mittens . . . four years old they might have been . . . they lagged behind and fell down and couldn't get up again. Captain Steinmetz ordered the children to be shot and Sergeant Leopold carried out the order . . . then afterwards there were three and I carried out the order. . . . Captain Steinmetz gave that order about the caps . . . made us take the prisoners' caps away from them. . . ."

The hoarse voice rattled on: ". . . fearful weather, cold, windy, snow . . . in the factory in the Fischerstrasse they stood like sardines. . . ."

Vilshofen opened his eyes again. The ravine was steaming, the side gullies were steaming, frost lay everywhere. The mist was rising up to the sky, a naked world of fog. By the bridge an evening star hung like the lamp of a ship at anchor, a pale patch in the fog. Voices rang out on the bridge; the sound was borne on the damp air as on a telephone-wire. Russian words: "*Tashtchie saboi!* Drag him along!" German words: "He's finished, he can't go on, and neither can we!"

Tapping, shuffling, sliding of tired feet. Somebody fell and remained lying on the bridge. His whimpering died down. Again words: "Oh, padre, you've still got something in your rucksack!" "Only last messages. But here in my coat pocket . . . the last packet of bread. . . ." And faintly, from the end of the bridge: "There, you'll have to make do with that now, till Gumrak."

Half-audible words. The sound of feet, twenty, thirty metres away. Then there was a stillness, a strange stillness. Seventy-seven days, a hundred days—since the Mius two hundred days and nights of thundering tanks, Stukas, assault guns. And now stillness, a strange, almost unbearable stillness. Sky and earth silent.

A coughing in the fog. A hoarse sentence; not on the bridge, not under the pale patch in the fog, but spoken by the sick man down in the balka: "We threw the caps away, out into the snow."

"Why out into the snow?" asked Vilshofen.

The delirious man answered: "So that they could be shot when they ran after them."

"Who ran after them?"

"The Russian prisoners," answered Gnotke.

"What's he talking about?" asked Vilshofen.

"He was once in the prisoners' guard and he's talking about it, about a transport of prisoners from Vyasma to Smolensk——"

Gimpf opened his eyes; it was one of his lucid intervals. His expression changed, his face cleared. He recognised his former commander.

"Were you with them, Gimpf?" asked Vilshofen.

"Tell the colonel why you were no good and why you were put in the punishment battalion," said Gnotke.

"I was in a prisoners' guard at Camp 271 in Vyasma," said Gimpf softly.

"Tell him about the transport of prisoners and how many it was."

"Fifteen thousand."

"How many got to Smolensk?"

"Two thousand."

"Where were the rest?" asked Vilshofen, suddenly bending forward and bringing his face close to that of the sick man.

"On the way . . ." answer Gimpf.

"On the way? And what was that you were saying?" —Vilshofen recalled the words half heard as he had dozed —"about children with fur caps and mittens?"

"Died on the way, the soldiers, the women, the children . . . the two frisky little ones were shot, and the three . ."

"Thirteen thousand! Gimpf! Gimpf!" Vilshofen gripped the sick man's arm. But Gimpf's face was distorted, his eyes bloodshot; he was losing consciousness again. Black foam came on his lips and through the breaking waves of foam he gurgled incoherent words: "Captain Steinmetz . . . no more cartridges . . . with a spade . . . oh, oh . . . snow. . . ."

The shuffling feet up there in the fog. The blue face of the dead soldier Schiele. The face of the dead Altenhuden. Gnotke bending over the convulsing Gimpf. The deathly silence. The catastrophe. . . .

Not only military errors, errors made on general-staff maps, mistakes in columns of figures. . . .

Three little children, four years old. How heavily weighed the murder of three children? And—staggering thought!—not only those three children, not only Vyasma. . . .

How heavily weighed the guilt? How heavily weighed the dead Stalingrad army, how heavily weighed that ghostly procession of prisoners? And what else could be placed on the scales? How could the guilt be balanced?

Children shot, old men, women, helpless prisoners shot, as the order required—"as the law commanded"! What sort of law was that? Was it a law of nature, of reason, of metaphysics, of human relations? Did it serve the interests of all? What was its origin? Who framed it?

Was it the law of the German people, of the people that produced a Gutenberg, a Matthias Grünewald, a Martin Luther, a Beethoven, an Immanuel Kant? Of a creative people living on the fruits of its achievements? Could the German people show no other political countenance to the world?

What a distorted countenance! A peasant lad of old Sauerland stock, red blotches on the neck, hair wet, eyes squinting, bubbling black foam on the lips, the last gurgling breath stinking. Yet that was not the real distortion; the catastrophe was more than military; it was more than a bone fracture; more than typhus foam on a face. German people, what madness and whose madness must you sweat out here!

Matthias Gimpf died. He had not even begun to live. In deep powdery snow on the road from Vyasma to Smolensk his life had stuck fast. He never got away from that road. He never got away from the face of a child that could not understand why it was suddenly turned into a motherless wolf-cub that must sink into the snow, that could not understand how a creature with a human face could bring it such a fate; Gimpf never got away from that child's face. The eyes of the Russian child and the big grey eyes of the Sauerland mother were one and the same question that must remain unanswered. A night without light, footsteps in the snow, footsteps here, footsteps there—and Gimpf died. The dying was hard—a contraction of the whole body, a spitting out of hot smoke, a limp falling back, again snow, great beads of sweat and gurgled words, and convulsions and retching where there was nothing more to vomit. His dying took a long time

and he died bit by bit. Last of all was the twitching of his left foot. It was the slightly frost-bitten foot which for weeks had been Gnotke's care. Now Vilshofen looked at this foot, or rather at the fur-lined boot which had once been his own, which he had given to Gnotke and was now on the foot of Gimpf.

"We've got to stick it out, Gnotke," said Vilshofen after a while.

Gnotke's eyes, too, were on the now motionless foot. He raised them to the bridge, then turned to Vilshofen, to the gaunt face with the prominent nose and the large eyes.

"No. Herr Oberst."

"Yes, we must, Gnotke!"

And now began a conversation between one who was quite alone and saw no farther, and one who meant to break through snow and confusion, through error, crime, and the doom wrought by the powers of darkness. For the first time Vilshofen learned that as a good officer who had lain forward in the muck and shared bread, cigarettes and many other things with his men, he had more to answer for than many a bad officer. Not the uncomradely officer, not one who flies out, not one who thinks first of his own skin and is trusted by none, but he, who had won their trust, had led the troops to destruction.

Someone at the edge of the bridge was howling out his soul into the night. Footsteps passed, but no one heeded him or his cries. Again a Russian voice "*Tashtchite saboi!*" Again lamentations: "We can't go on ourselves!" Then an angry voice, an order shouted in Russian, and the man picked up and taken along, perhaps to be dropped again farther on. And here sat a man who had carried another along for weeks and given him his own boots. In this territory, where men were run over by fleeing columns of vehicles, where those who were presumably still fit left lorry-loads of sick and wounded men in the snow, where whole hospitals went up in smoke, such actions were rare and such a spirit was badly needed. But this man had had enough; he had been through hell and he wanted to go no farther.

"There lies Altenhuden," said Gnotke. "Only yesterday he said he must repair the farmyard door, the hinge is rusted through. And there's Schiele; he's got a daughter and nobody else, and he said he must draw out his balance

from the savings-bank so that she won't lose her mother's property. If I'd had to listen to that sort of stupid talk a few years ago I'd have broken a chair over them. I was in the S.A. then, and anything I didn't understand seemed to me stupid and a bit suspicious. There they lie now, and I'm not so indifferent to the fact that they're lying there—and Gimpf, too. Well, here I am and here I'll stay. I don't want any more. I've had enough! "

The procession had been passing over the bridge from noon to midnight. The fog had descended, crawled back into the gullies whence it had risen. There was the bridge from one bank of snow to the other, and the bridge itself was snow, with the starry sky above and the men passing over the bridge like a grey river. The stiff figures down below—if a glance alighted on them they were scarcely noticed. If a Russian guard saw them, they were merely a group of frozen corpses such as lay left and right on the way.

The defeat was the defeat of every single man. The numbed limbs, the numbed souls passing over the bridge were the burnt-out slag of the lost battle. There were generals among them; they knew and they were already talking about the lost war. Vilshofen looked at the man who, with hands hidden in the sleeves of his greatcoat, huddled there with head on arms and seemed a part of the silent company. Gnotke had experienced the defeat long ago. Vilshofen knew that he had deserted from the S.A. in 1934; that before Moscow he had been " written off " for the second time; and that the wild strength of the weed, or some inherent fortitude, had enabled him to come through the trials that had raged over him. He had remained a man; he knew all about Altenhuden, Schiele, Gimpf; he was a man with his roots in his surroundings, and hence his strength. He felt guilty for the mischief wrought, remembering what he did once when he smashed a chair. He had trodden the road back to the origin of the German malady. Generals were against the enterprise of the Führer because he was losing the war. Gnotke was against him because he started the war, because ten years ago he started the war against the German people and misused the people for interests inimical to them. That was a difference, or at least an essentially different stage of realisation. So this man with the bony face, risen again out of hunger, fire and death, was indeed a grain of salt,

one of those whom the cheated, beaten, hopeless, numbed people needed in order to find the way back and rise again.

"Gnotke!"

Gnotke raised his head and listened. He realised that it was another beaten man who spoke to him, another who was suffering and wracked with much thinking. Had Vilshofen used such a tone fourteen days earlier, Captain Döllwang, Lieutenant Latte, Privates Liebig, Fell, Liebsch, Kalbach, Tünnes and a hundred others might be still alive. Had he used such a tone earlier still, the whole panzer regiment that was his might perhaps have acted. Now Gnotke paid attention. True it is, he told himself, one must in all circumstances live; but again, one must know what to live for. This colonel was indeed like a man with a lantern in his hand trying to find his way through the long darkness. But what was there about himself, Gnotke, that the other should insist on his company?

"There lies Altenhuden, there lies Schiele." This time Vilshofen said it. "Broken farmyard doors, rusted hinges, all Germany a smashed earthenware jar. More than once a mother's property has been lost. So many bereaved, ruined, directionless people; so much to be made good. Don't you think, Gnotke, that every hand and every head will be needed?"

"I believe that right enough. But . . . well . . . I've got to say it—I'm from the punishment battalion, from the lowest of the low, and you, Herr Oberst——"

"Not exactly from the highest of the high, but from the command staff—and there the guilt is greater than that of a soldier from the punishment battalion."

"For the lost battle you mean, Herr Oberst?"

"Here in the Stalingrad nights I've been thinking of other things besides the catastrophe of the battlefield. When I speak of guilt now I mean the guilt against our own people. Though they may not be lost they have certainly been led astray and their physical existence threatened. And that's got to be put right!"

"Oh, I see——"

"What do you mean, 'oh, I see'?"

"I suppose Herr Oberst is thinking of the next war?"

"No. Gnotke. For one thing the weapons were too crude. For another they were applied in the wrong direction. The inward guilt became an even greater

outward guilt. I think our task is not with Europe, not with the outside world. First and foremost we must put our own house in order."

"Oh, I see! Black Reichwehr and that sort of thing. I know all about that, we had it in Pomerania. Political murder and the slaughter of the S.A."

"Man! Gnotke! Every man should be able to breathe and be master in his own house. What he makes with his hands he should have the right to own and enjoy. That, roughly speaking, is the order that's got to be created."

"Yes, we heard something like that then, too."

"*Mein Gott*, all pictures burned, all words twisted round, all sources stopped, no faith left, nothing left . . . "

It was a strange conversation between a general—though as such he was an unusual sight—and a sergeant; but then it was carried on at a strange time. Two frozen corpse-faces and a doubled-up corpse-bundle were the witnesses. Low fog drifted round the group. The sky was high and cold and full of twinkling stars. Over the bridge went what once had been an élite army. The odour of death was in the air. It was the scenery of a theatre of war at the moment when the curtain falls.

Two faces: the general and the burial-man, no longer general and burial-man. How could they come together? How was it possible? There had been fighting and destruction; and if the fighting was futile, what good could come of the destruction? A monstrous cup of tears spilt into the snow—and was nothing to remain, nothing . . . ? Were the two beaten men not to find the way to each other to resolve once and for all on a crusade against a system that was nothing but a campaign through the blood of nations and a crucifixion of their own people? Or was it to have no end?

"Man! Gnotke! Beyond this forsaken battlefield, beyond this lost war loom new battlefields and future theatres of war! "

"I've had enough of it! "

"So have I! "

"I don't know, Herr Oberst, how we two can go on together."

"That's just what we've got to find out, that's the most important thing."

That was what the two men under the falling curtain

had to do and what they undertook to find out. It was not the end of the tragedy, it was only the end of an act.

. . . . .

There was snow, there was morning and evening mist, there was the sky, and for the second time white mist rose from all the gullies. Silence over all the fields, and on the rubble-heaps of the devastated villages the chirping of sparrows. Again it was evening. When the morning came the white ball of the sun rose from the frozen Volga and rolled on its high gleaming path over the chimneys and roofless skeletons of the Stalingrad world of ruins. Beneath it lay the cracked white mirror of the Volga steppe. The sun rolled on towards the Rossoshka Hills, towards the Don, and sank in a fiery glow over the fields and hills of the Don land. And from the Volga to the Don and far and wide over all the steppe there was silence.

Through snow and silence the procession went on, day and night, across the broad white saucer framed in the Volga Hills and the Rossoshka Hills; from Stalingrad-Central across the airfield and over the Balka Krutaya, over the flat steppe, along by the railway to Gumrak, and on over the Don steppe in the direction of Kotluban; from Stalingrad-North through Gorodishtche and Alexandrovka, and again pouring across the Don steppe towards Kotluban, where the procession would reach undevastated land and the railway.

Sparrows chirped in the snow and in the silence and in the deserted villages. On the steppe black clouds of crows fluttered up from the heaps of corpses and hovered with a heavy beating of wings above the slowly-moving line of stumbling figures. The route lay through stretches marked by jutting horse-bones, and on the way figures in tattered soldier-greatcoats appeared and stood staring with wide feverish eyes at the men passing by. But the prisoners scarcely raised their eyes; as those standing by called to them they answered in hollow voices that the position must be held, and vanished into the mist.

In the fog the moving hordes resembled a dark, trickling stream of larva; in the bright sunshine they were like loose drifting clouds. During the short halts on the way they crowded in dugouts, cheek by jowl and leg to leg. The bunks were covered with bunches of men, and when those lying on an upper bunk fell through they did not rise even if those beneath were crushed and killed. Outside in the

glittering night men stood under the stars, as calves stand in circles in summer with heads together to shield them from the merciless sun of the steppe.

On and on at a speed of one kilometre an hour. On the horizon rose a steppe settlement. When the procession reached it, it was nothing but a gigantic jam of wrecked and plundered lorries, armoured cars, trucks and omnibuses. Nobody took any notice when a man sank down by the side of a vehicle or crawled under it to rise no more. The way sloped down a ravine which was nothing but a grave of tanks, assault-guns and flak-guns, and a haunt of black swarms of crows. On the other side the way led up to level ground again. Feet trudged, shuffled and slid along a road which had once been the scene of a panic flight. More wheels had rolled over the men run down and trampled into the ground, and now in the ice covering it was a mosaic of heads, hands and faces over which feet were treading.

The horde went through Gumrak, past the station full of frozen corpses, past the wagons of corpses standing on a dozen tracks—wagons bearing inscriptions visible under the snow, such as " Deutsche Reichsbahn Düsseldorf," " Deutsche Reichsbahn Hannover," " France," " Belge," " Danmark," " Eesti," " Rzeczpospolita Polksa," " Jugoslavia." The foot wrapped in rags did not tremble when it trod on a broad flattened face on the " mosaic road." Nor did the huge motor-cemetery recall the triumphant advance, nor the tank-grave in the ravine recall the shattered army; nor did the corpse-filled wagons with their inscriptions of all lands stir thoughts of the human cemetery which the army had left behind it and of the slave Reich that was to have been set up.

Here and there was one who still thought. As Major Holmers marched by the railway-wagons he made out the white letters " Eesti " and " Romania " and recalled that once those same wagons had run to Hamburg with emigrants and loads of naphtha, lead, maize and currants.

As Chief Staff-Medical Officer Simmering went by the station-hall, past a great heap of amputated arms, legs and limbless torsos, he turned away. Senior-M.O. Huth, marching beside him, said, " Aid is not always aid."

" If it serves a crime it becomes a crime itself," said Simmering to himself, pursuing the thought.

As Major Buchner looked up from his dejected trudging

and half-unconscious thoughts and saw beyond the railway-track the wrecked 8.8 cm. flak, the strewn ammunition-boxes and rucksacks, and snow-covered remains of men, he said to himself: "No moaning on the telephone, but the flak turned round and everything shot into the Tulevoi ravine at the raving lunatics in the staff quarters! That would have been a way out and would have considerably shortened the process of murder, for such it was and nothing else!"

Little Lieutenant Lawkow, trudging through a bunker-village strewn with burst boxes and empty conserve-tins south of Stalingradski, thought: "That's what it was like days ago when the staff did a bunk. They calculated right, they thought the shop was going bust anyway, whether they led or not, and away they went. And we bloody fools stayed and held the position! We carried into the war with us a crazy idea about Rothschild and Ballin and Bleichröder and the 'international plunderers of nations' .... And in the end here on the Volga we've got a whole gang of wreckers, with red stripes on their trousers and a window-pane stuck in the eye and all! And a wreck like this lot the world has never seen!"

Private Widomec recalled the starving Greeks, Rumanians, Poles and Slovaks in the streets of Vienna and thought: "This had to happen to us!"

But there were few who thought like this or indeed thought at all. The mass trudged on at a speed of one kilometre an hour. The army had been an élite army and had been mostly recruited not in towns but from country districts. The peasant lads had already been torn from their soil by "Arbeitsdienst" and pre-military training, and those who were infantrymen had a march of more than two thousand kilometres behind them. Their intestines, as later post-mortems showed, were without windings and flat as tape; the men were outwardly and inwardly deformed. They found themselves now in the bottomless pit, and with the last roar of their cannon their souls seemed to have fluttered away; the silence they were going through was already like the land of death. They trudged on, with frozen feet or frozen toes, faces gnawed by frost, some without ears, some without noses. To them the chevrons of lance-corporal and sergeant had been the rank-badges of the only conceivable order, and with the vanished importance of these badges their world of order had

collapsed. They drifted on, and it was an exception when a hand was held out to one of them; it was scarcely thinkable for a last crust of bread to be shared. The whole organism was sick, the cell was sick, and each man was alone. The organism was dissolved into blood and mucus and yellow and black bile. The individual found himself on the brink of dissolution. Only a step separated him from it, with only one hand he was holding on to the ship of life. Many let go, their will-power used up on the endless road and in the thunder of battle from the Carpathians to the Volga.

The chaos had been ordered and there it was!

The grey procession reached the plain of the Don and streamed on by the railway-track towards Kotluban. At villages, at stud-farms, at tractor-stations, stood wagons; the wagons took up the flood of men, and on they rolled on railway-axles. The excreta that poured out of the closets of the wagons and froze in thick lumps of bloody red on axles and wheels betrayed the passenger that travelled with the afflicted multitude.

Like a plague-ship this procession, on the march through the white land and rolling onward on railway-axles, left dead in its wake—those who died of their wounds, of white and red dysentery, of sheer paralysis of the spirit. These dead don't count; their names were written in snow. But there are graves of Russian military doctors and of male and female nurses who accompanied the procession and found death on the journey. These graves count; they are written in the book of humanity. One the first stage, to the first assembly-camp, there are forty-two of them.

Human beings misled and scattered, striding over all the drawn frontiers, following the unfurled banner of insanity, spreading over the map of Europe—and in this inhuman enterprise ground to refuse, ground to dust. . . .

This nation in its deep midnight must be guided to the shore of a new day, must not fade away as a colour on the palette of humanity, must not die out as a tone in the universal orchestra. Germany must live, even after this downfall; and for that men and women of good will must join hands so that they may find the right road that all can travel. That was what the two men in the Balka Krutaya had to talk about and make clear to each other. And despite their common language it seemed very

difficult, so deep was the chasm, so blocked were all ways, so misused all words, so misused good faith.

A wind sprang up, an icy wind from the snowy wastes of the East. But because the sun shone over all the fields from Pamir and Lake Balkash across the Aral Sea to the Volga and the air was filled with sparkling diamonds, it was the first promise of spring that hummed through the hollow houses, the jutting ruins, the ragged walls of the town of Stalingrad, and on over the broad land, pitted and torn with shell-holes and trenches and strewn with heaps of shattered tanks, motors, wheels and guns. And in the sky was nothing, no more zooming of engines, no more fountains of snow and earth, nothing but the sighing of the wind. The earth was empty. And from Stalingrad-Central, through Gumrak and on to the villages of the Don steppe, ran a broad track of many feet, a long straight line, a nation's line of destiny. . . .

And there was the Balka Krutaya with three corpses laid together under a mound of snow. From there a track led up the ravine and across the white field, to lose itself in the broad path of many feet trodden in the snow.

It was the footprints of two men striding side by side.

THE END

1857

Autumn 1942: Stalingrad lies in ruins, battered by the might of Nazi Germany's armed forces. The surviving Russian troops are told: "There is no retreat for you back across the Volga. Only one road remains, the road leading forward. You will save Stalingrad—or you will be wiped out with it."

Battle continues, savage, exhausting, relentless. The Germans are halted. Then driven slowly back. Then, finally, encircled. And now the Russians have the most effective ally of all fighting for them.

Their cruel, freezing, killing winter which clamps down like a fist of iron frost over the town that is Stalingrad...

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